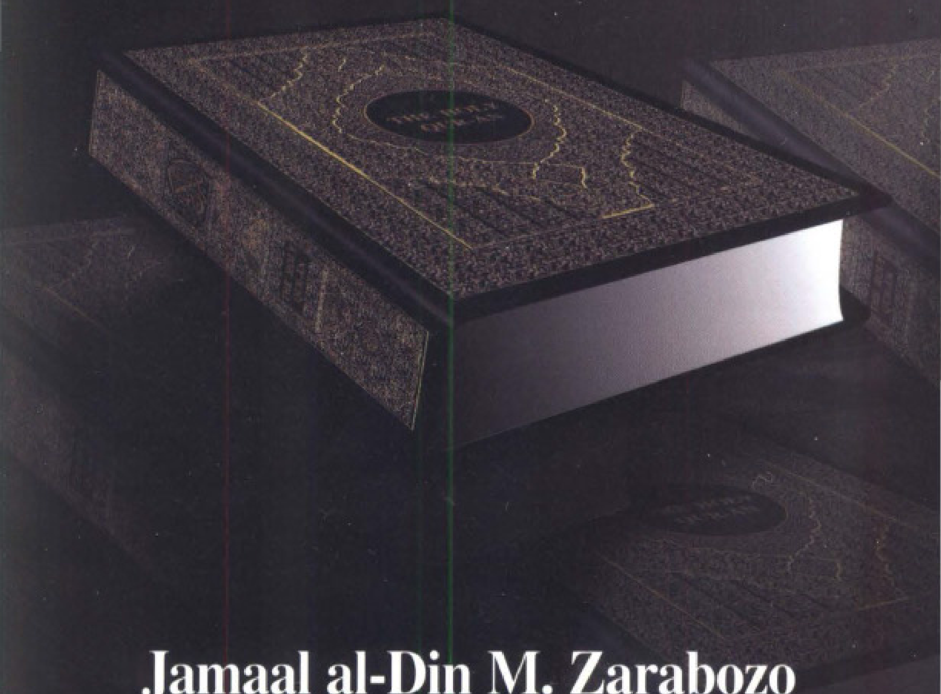
How to Approach and Understand the Quran



Jamaal al-Din M. Zarabozo

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By Jamaal al-Din M. Zarabozo

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Preface

In the name of Allah, Most Compassionate, Most Merciful All praises are due to Allah; we praise Him; we seek His help; we seek His forgiveness; and we seek His guidance. We seek refuge in Allah from the evil in our souls and the badness of our deeds. For whomever Allah guides, there is none to lead him astray. And for whomever He allows to go astray, there is none to guide him. I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship except Allah, for whom there is no partner. And I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and Messenger. O believers, have *taqwa* [fear] of Allah according to His right and die not save as Muslims. O mankind, have *taqwa* of your Lord, the One who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and from them spread forth many men and women. And fear Allah from whom you demand your mutual rights and [do not cut] familial ties. Surely, Allah is ever an All-Watcher over you. O believers, have *taqwa* of Allah and always speak the truth. He will direct you to do righteous deeds and will forgive you your sins. And whosoever obeys Allah and His Messenger has indeed achieved a great achievement.

To proceed: Verily, the truest speech is the Book of Allah. The best guidance is the guidance of Muhammad. The worst affairs are the innovated ones. Every innovated matter is a heresy. And every heresy is a going astray. And every astray act is in the Hell-fire.

I praise and thank Allah for giving me the ability to complete this book. I pray that He accepts this work from me and forgives me for any mistakes and errors that have occurred herein.

As always, there are many people whom I would like to thank for their help in this particular work. First, I would like to express my thanks to the sister (who prefers to remain anonymous) who edited and reviewed the work. I must also express my appreciation to Nahar al-Rashid, Humaidan al-Turki, Said Lahrichi, Muhammad al-Osimi, Fahd al-Yahya, Ahmad al-Teraiqi, Muhammad Tahlawi and Sulaiman al-Thunayan. Of course, my beloved wife deserves special mention for all of her years of encouragement, help and patience.

It should be noted that this work had a number of appendices originally included with it. As the work was getting longer and the direct relationship of those appendices with the tone of the book was being questioned, it was decided to compile those topics in another work, entitled *The Quran: Its Virtues and Its Fiqh* that, Allah willing, will be published in the future.

Finally, I pray that this work is beneficial to those who read it. If anyone has any comments, corrections or suggestions for this work, they should feel free to contact me through the publisher.

Jamaal Zarabozo
Boulder, CO
U.S.A.
April 15, 1999

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Chapter I
Introduction

Allah says in the Quran,

يَاأَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولُنَا يُبَيِّنُ لَكُمْ كَثِيرًا مِمَّا كُنْتُمْ تُخْفُونَ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَيَعْفُو عَنْ كَثِيرٍ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ نُورٌ وَكِتَابٌ مُبِينٌ يَهْدِي بِهِ اللَّهُ مَنِ اتَّبَعَ رِضْوَانَهُ سُبُلَ السَّلَامِ وَيُخْرِجُهُمْ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَيَهْدِيهِمْ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ

"O people of the Book, there has come to you Our messenger, revealing to you much that you used to hide in the Book, and passing over much (that is now unnecessary); there has come to you from Allah a (new) light and a perspicuous Book. Wherewith Allah guides all who seek His good pleasure to ways of peace and safety, and leads them out of darkness, by His will, unto the light guiding them to a path that is straight" (*al-Maaidah* 15-16). And,

الر كِتَابٌ أَنزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ لِتُخْرِجَ النَّاسَ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِمْ إِلَى صِرَاطِ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَمِيدِ

"*Alif Lam Ra.* A book We revealed to you in order that you might take mankind from the depths of darkness to light by the will of their Lord and to the path of Him, the Exalted in power, worthy of all praise" (*Ibraaheem* 1). Allah also says,

إِنَّ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ يَهْدِي لِلَّتِي هِيَ أَقْوَمُ

"And this Quran leads to the path that is most right " (*al-Israa* 9).

Reading these words of the Quran and looking at the political, economic and moral plight of the Muslims in the world today, a non-believing skeptic could ask: Are these words really true? Where does one see the reality of these verses among those people who claim to believe in and apply the Quran? Can one see the Muslims living in light or could one argue that they are in darkness?

Obviously these words of Allah in the Quran are true. There can be no doubt about them. In fact, when one studies the history of the Quran and the effect it has had in the past upon those who believed in it, one will find that these words were fulfilled.

It is saddening that Muslims possess this great book of guidance yet for many of them, their lives do not reflect the blessings and guidance of its teachings. This phenomenon might be quite perplexing for some people. It might be difficult for some to understand how the Muslims have gotten to the situation that they are currently in. The answer seems to lie in how Muslims approach and understand the Quran. There might be some problem in their treatment of the Quran or their approach to it. This, in turn, leads to the state where the guidance exists in the Quran but it is not having the effect on humanity that it could be having.

This work, in essence, touches upon how many Muslims are currently approaching the Quran. It also suggests an appropriate approach to the Quran. Finally, it deals with the proper methodology that should be used to understand or interpret the Quran.

In an effort to understand the large disparity between the kind of life the Quran is seeking to bring about and the

plight of Muslims today, this book will be comprised of the following chapters:

(1) This introductory chapter sheds light on the overall tone and goal of the book.

(2) The second chapter presents some of the important characteristics of the Quran, to remind the reader of what the Quran actually is and what is one's obligation toward it.

(3) The third chapter is entitled, "The Quranic Generation or the Result of Approaching and Understanding the Quran Correctly." In essence, it is an overview of the effect the Quran had upon the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). It contrasts their lives before they were guided by the Quran with their lives after they had been imbued with the teachings of the Quran. It demonstrates the heights that mankind can reach when they turn to the Quran in the proper manner.

(4) The fourth chapter deals with the manner in which many of today's Muslims are approaching the Quran. The Quran is still revered and honored by Muslims throughout the world. Yet, their reverence and honor—or use of the Book—may not be in accord with the real purposes or goals of the Book. Hence, this chapter discusses how many Muslims today are viewing the Quran. Although many of the practices of Muslims vis-a-vis the Quran are correct, they are related to secondary matters and not the major goals of the Quran.

This chapter also includes a discussion of how Muslims read the Quran. Part of the problem is not simply how people use the Quran but that even when reading the Quran, many do not read it in the manner that will lead to the greatest amount of benefit. Hence, the proper mode of reading the Quran has been discussed in this chapter as it is definitely a prerequisite for the other steps described in this book.

(5) The fifth chapter covers the major goals of the Quran. When one clearly understands the major goals of the Quran, he will turn to the Quran with the intention of achieving these goals. He will understand the verses of the Quran in the light of these goals. This will be, Allah willing, one of the first steps leading to a more complete understanding and application of the Quran in his life.

(6) The sixth chapter is a discussion of how one should approach the Quran. After realizing what the Quran is attempting to bring about (chapter three), this chapter emphasizes some attitudes that one should possess while reading the Quran. If these attitudes are present in the heart and soul of the reader of the Quran, it will be easier for him to grasp the teachings of the Quran and apply them to his life.

(7) The seventh chapter deals with the proper method of Quranic interpretation. Even if a person reads the Quran daily, his understanding of the Quran may be distant from what the Quran is actually stating if he is not following the proper method of interpretation. This chapter mostly deals with the sources of Quranic exegesis that one must turn to.

(8) The last chapter presents some final thoughts on this topic. It briefly discusses the need and urgency of properly returning to the Quran to live according to its teachings. The only hope for salvation in the Hereafter is in believing in and following the Quran. Similarly, the only true hope that humanity as a whole can have for a happy and balanced life in this world is also a proper return to the Quran.

Allah willing, this book will be a discussion of these essential points related to how Muslims approach the Quran. It is hoped that by openly discussing and analyzing these points, some of the shortcomings will be overcome. The attempt here is to help Muslims get as much as they can from the wonderful and miraculous Quran. Reading the Quran will then have the desired effect on them and will change them. The Quran will then bring them closer to Allah. It will

increase their understanding of Islam. It will make them realize their role and purpose on this earth. Finally, in the Hereafter, it will lead to their success in Paradise. The increased understanding and application of the Quran will lead to it being a proof on their behalf and an intercessor for their cause. And Allah will be pleased with them.

These are, of course, great goals. The author does not claim that this book in and of itself will ensure the achievement of those goals. Instead, this is meant to be a step in that direction. It is meant to return the Muslim to the Quran with a heart that will be receptive to the guidance of the Quran. It is meant to assist the Muslim in getting some of the wonderful guidance of the Quran by the will and mercy of Allah.

Chapter 2
The Quran: What It Is and What Is One's Obligation Toward It

Before delving into the main goal of this work, it was thought best to begin with a reminder: a reminder of what the Quran truly is and what a Muslim's obligation is toward it. Probably no Muslim ever forgets that the Quran is the revelation from Allah that He revealed to His final messenger Muhammad (peace be upon him). At the same time, though, a Muslim may not completely realize the ramifications of that fact. He may forget some of wonderful aspects that Allah has stated concerning the Quran. He may also be neglectful of what the Prophet (peace be upon him) has said about the Quran.

The first goal of this chapter, therefore, is simply to remind the reader of what the Quran is. Undoubtedly, the more a believer knows about the Quran, the more he will yearn to learn it. The more a person realizes about the Quran, the closer he will want it to be to his heart and mind. The one who knows the Quran the best is its speaker, Allah. So first there will be a discussion of selected verses from the Quran that describe the Quran itself.[1] The one who knows the Quran second best is the one who received it as revelation, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Hence, some of his statements concerning the Quran will also be

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[1] It is beyond the scope of this work to discuss all the Quranic verses that discuss or describe the Quran itself. Only a handful of verses will be discussed here. The interested reader may consult the following work which is an entire work discussing those verses of the Quran that discuss the Quran itself: Muhammad al-Raaawi, *Hadeeth al-Quran an al-Quran* (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Ubaikaan, 1994), *passim*.

discussed. Quotes from those who learned the Quran from the Prophet (peace be upon him) and who implemented it in their lives will also be presented. The chapter will then end with a general description of a Muslim's obligation toward this great and noble Quran.

What Allah Says about the Quran

In the opening passages of the Quran, the beginning of *soorah al-Baqarah*, Allah says,

ذَٰلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ هُدًى لِلْمُتَّقِينَ

"This is the Book,[1] concerning which there is no doubt, a guidance for those who fear Allah" (*al-Baqarah* 2). In the

[1] Throughout the Quran, there are two words that are used quite often as a reference to the Quran: the Quran and the Book. The word "the Quran" is a verbal noun implying, "the reading or the recital." This implies that the Quran is something that is recited by the tongue. The word "the Book" implies that it is recorded. Daraaz notes that these two words used for the Quran imply how the Quran was and is to be preserved. It was and is used to be preserved in the hearts as well as in written form. If a mistake creeps into one of those two forms, it can be spotted and corrected by the other form. This is, in reality, how the Quran has been passed on throughout the centuries. Thus, there is no room for anyone to doubt the authenticity and purity of the Quran. Daraaz goes on to make another point about these two words used for the Quran. Both of these words come from roots that imply, "combining or joining something together." In the case of reciting, one joins the different letters together to pronounce the proper sounds that make up the words. In the case of writing something down, one also joins the different letters together to record the proper words. Daraaz then states that one can make the following conclusion: These words of the Quran combine together all of the meanings, knowledge and truths that one needs to live. This conclusion is supported by what Allah Himself has said about the Quran, "And We have sent down to you the Book as an exposition of everything" (*al-Nahl* 89). [See Muhammad Abdullah Daraaz, *Al-Naba al-Adheem: Nadharaat Jadeedah fi al-Quraan* (Riyadh: Daar Taibah, 1997), pp. 5-6.] Long before Daraaz, al-Raaghib al-Isfahaani made the same point concerning why this revelation is called the "Quran" in comparison with the previous revelations; it encompasses all that the previous scriptures

typical translation of this verse, the verse seems not to say a great deal about the Quran. In reality, though, in this verse, Allah has stated many important points about this Book.[1] The first aspect that one notes is that Allah refers to the Book with the demonstrative pronoun *dhaalika*, which would normally be translated as, "that" instead of "this." However, the word "that" is used for "this" for particular reasons. Siddiqi noted,

> The demonstrative pronoun ذلك ["that"] indicates remoteness of distance, but at times it indicates esteem, honour and grandeur of that for which it is used as we find in the case of the Quran.[2]

Second, the phrase is actually more comparable to something like, "This is *the* Book." It implies that it is the most complete book and that no other book deserves to be called a "book" like this book does. It is the real book that encompasses what no other previous book encompasses. In other words, Allah is pointing to the completeness and

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encompassed as well as all the knowledge necessary for mankind. See al-Raaghib al-Isfahaani, *Mujam Mufradaat Alfaadh al-Quraan* (Beirut: Daar al-Fikr, n.d.), p. 414.

[1] One will note that in many cases the true or complete ramifications of the original Arabic of the Quran are very difficult or impossible to capture in a mere translation. Of course, the English translation cannot be called the Quran. The Quran is only the original Arabic text. No matter how excellent a translation may be, it can never match the miraculous nature and linguistic excellence of the Quran.

[2] Abdul Hameed Siddiqi, *The Holy Quran: English Translation and Explanatory Notes* (Lahore, Pakistan: Islamic Book Centre, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 10. There are some commentators who understand the demonstrative pronoun phrase here to mean, "that is the book." They are then forced to explain what is the referent of "that." Fakhar al-Deen Al-Raazi has given seven possible explanations. [See Fakhar al-Deen al-Raazi, *al-Tafseer al-Kabeer* (Beirut: Daar Ihyaa al-Turaath al-Arabi, n.d.), vol. 2, pp. 12-13.] However, it is clear from the statements of the Companions that the meaning of the phrase is "this is the book" and not "that is the book." This controversy is discussed in detail in this author's lecture series, "*Tafseer Soorah al-Baqarah*," Lecture #3.

perfection of this book and, hence, its superiority over all over books.[1]

Third, Allah mentions that this is a book concerning which there can be no doubt. It is the case that many disbelievers and skeptics doubt this book. However, that is not the meaning of this passage. The meaning is that the proofs and evidence that this is a true and perfect revelation from Allah are so great and clear that there is in reality no room or reason for anyone to doubt this book. This applies to the book as a whole and every portion of its guidance. There should be no doubt concerning anything that Allah has stated in this book. The absence of doubt, as al-Saadi points out, implies that the believer must be completely certain and satisfied that everything stated in this book is true.[2]

Fourth, Allah describes this book as "guidance." Commenting on this portion of the verse, al-Saadi noted,

> Allah stated the word "guidance" without stating its regimen or governing word. He did not say, "Guidance for the benefit of so and so," or "for the benefit of such and such purpose." [Such was not said] so that the concept of guidance may be left in its generality. It is guidance for all of the needs and benefits of the life of this world and that of the Hereafter. It is the guide for humans concerning fundamental and secondary aspects. It distinguishes truth from falsehood and what is sound from what is weak. And it makes clear for them how to follow the path that is beneficial for them in both their worldly affairs and their other worldly matters.[3]

This verse makes it clear that the Quran is first and foremost a book of guidance. This is a point that shall be

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1 Cf., Abdul Rahmaan al-Saadi, *Taiseer al-Kareem al-Rahmaan fi Tafseer Kalaam al-Mannaan* (Beirut: Muassasah al-Risaalah, 1996), p. 23.
2 Al-Saadi, p. 23.
3 Al-Saadi, p. 23.

discussed later and forms one of the main focuses of this present work.

Finally, in this verse, Allah mentions that the book is a guidance for those who have *taqwa* (fear of Allah and God-consciousness). Elsewhere Allah has described this revelation as,

هُدًى لِلنَّاسِ وَبَيِّنَاتٍ مِنْ الْهُدَى وَالْفُرْقَانِ

"A guidance for mankind and clear proofs for the guidance and the criterion [between right and wrong]" (*al-Baqarah* 185). What these two verses, *al-Baqarah* 2 and *al-Baqarah* 185, imply is that the guidance of the Quran is there for everyone to see and benefit from. However, not everyone is gong to benefit from its wonderful guidance. Only those who approach the Quran in the proper way, seeking to obey it and implement its guidance, will be the ones who truly benefit from the guidance of the Quran.

Allah also refers to Quran as *rooh* ("spirit"). Allah says,

وَكَذَلِكَ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ رُوحًا مِنْ أَمْرِنَا

"Thus We have revealed to you a *rooh*[1] of Our command" (*al-Shoora* 52). While commenting upon this verse, Saalih al-Fauzaan noted that *rooh* implies the thing that gives life to a heart. In the same way that the physical heart's life is directly tied to a *rooh*, the spiritual life is also directly tied to a *rooh*, and that *rooh* is the Quran. It is this Quran that gives life to the spiritual heart. If the heart is void of the Quran,

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[1] *Rooh* lexically refers to the "spirit, soul". In this particular verse, it has been interpreted in a number of ways. Some say that it means prophethood; others say that it means "a mercy"; others have said that it means "book"; and another interpretation is that it is in reference to the Angel Gabriel. [See Muhammad al-Qurtubi, *al-Jaami li-Ahkaam al-Quraan* (Beirut: Daar Ihyaa al-Turaath al-Arabi, n.d.), vol. 16, pp. 54-55.] In any case, the Quran has been referred to as *rooh* and many scholars agree that there is a special significance in this description that is discussed above in the text.

then it is in fact spiritually dead, no matter how much it may be physically alive in this world.

The heart attains real life when it is joined with the Quran. It is by the teachings of the Quran that the heart truly knows its Lord and knows how to worship Him. The heart then becomes filled with love of Allah, fear of Allah, reverence for Him and hope in Him. These are some of the key ingredients that are needed for a healthy heart. The heart is moved by the Quran in the same way that the physical heart is moved by the physical soul. The physical death that is the result of the loss of the *rooh* cannot compare to the spiritual death that is the result of being void of the spiritual *rooh* or the Quran. Physical death comes to believers, disbelievers, evildoers and even animals. Its result is a departure from this worldly life. A spiritual death is what the disbelievers are experiencing and its result is the painful abode of the Hell-fire forever.[1]

Al-Raawi notes that people are very much aware of the result of the physical *rooh* leaving the body. When that happens, they take the body and bury it as it is not able to perform any action since its *rooh* has left. In a sense, it has become useless. At the same time, people disregard what happens when the effects of the Quran are no longer seen on a person. They do not see what happens to the person in both this life and the Hereafter when he has lost the *rooh* of the Quran. Without this *rooh*, a person is truly spiritually dead even though it looks to all around him that he is physically alive. He is dead because he is not even realizing his purpose in this life. He is living his life without heading toward its proper goal, hence, he may as well be physically dead.[2]

In the same verse quoted above, as in other verses, Allah describes the Quran as a "light" (*noor*). Allah says,

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[1] Saalih al-Fauzaan, *Muhaadhiraat fi al-Aqeedah wa al-Dawah* (Riyadh: Daar al-Aasimah, 1415 A.H.), vol. 2, pp. 291-292.

[2] Al-Raawi, pp. 387-8.

وَكَذَلِكَ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ رُوحًا مِنْ أَمْرِنَا مَا كُنتَ تَدْرِي مَا الْكِتَابُ وَلا الإِيمَانُ وَلَكِنْ جَعَلْنَاهُ نُورًا نَهْدِي بِهِ مَنْ نَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا وَإِنَّكَ لَتَهْدِي إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ

"Thus We have revealed to you a *rooh* of Our command. You knew not what is the Book nor what is faith. But We have made it [this Quran] a light (*noor*) wherewith We guide whosoever of Our servants We will. And verily you guide [mankind] to the straight path" (*al-Shoora* 52).

Light is the thing that shows the person the path in front of him. It is by light that he can avoid the harmful objects in his way and follow the way that is most beneficial. However, as al-Fauzaan noted, this is different from the light that one physically senses in this world. This is a spiritual light. By this light, one recognizes and understands what will benefit him in both his mundane and religious spheres. He will recognize truth from falsehood and he will be following the path that leads to Paradise.[1]

This light leads to the Straight Path and Allah's grace and mercy. However, as will be a recurring theme throughout this work, that light is only beneficial for one who follows it. Allah says,

يَاأَيُّهَا النَّاسُ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ بُرْهَانٌ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ وَأَنزَلْنَا إِلَيْكُمْ نُورًا مُبِينًا فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَاعْتَصَمُوا بِهِ فَسَيُدْخِلُهُمْ فِي رَحْمَةٍ مِنْهُ وَفَضْلٍ وَيَهْدِيهِمْ إِلَيْهِ صِرَاطًا مُسْتَقِيمًا

"O mankind! Verily, there has come to you a convincing proof from your Lord, and We sent down to you a manifest light [this Quran]. So, as for those who believed in Allah and

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1 Al-Fauzaan, p. 292.

held fast to it [the Quran],[1] He will admit them to His mercy and grace, and guide them to Himself by a Straight Path" (*al-Nisaa* 174-175).

From the above it is clear that the Quran is the key to the believers' real and true life. Without the Quran, a person is suffering from a spiritual death and living in darkness. In fact, Allah has said in reference to the guidance that He revealed and blesses His followers with,

أَوَمَنْ كَانَ مَيْتًا فَأَحْيَيْنَاهُ وَجَعَلْنَا لَهُ نُورًا يَمْشِي بِهِ فِي النَّاسِ كَمَنْ مَثَلُهُ فِي الظُّلُمَاتِ لَيْسَ بِخَارِجٍ مِنْهَا

"Is he who was dead and We gave him life and set for him a light whereby he can walk among men like him who is in the darkness from which he can never come out?" (*al-Anaam* 122).

Allah also says about the Quran,

لَقَدْ أَنزَلْنَا إِلَيْكُمْ كِتَابًا فِيهِ ذِكْرُكُمْ أَفَلا تَعْقِلُونَ

"Indeed, We have sent down for you [O mankind] a book in which there is your honor and distinction[2] [for the one who follows it]. Will you not then understand?" (*al-Anbiyaa* 10). This verse was first addressed to the Arabs of the Quraish.[3] It was a great blessing upon them that this Quran was revealed in their language. If they then adhered to it, they

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[1] An alternative interpretation for "held fast to it," is, "held fast to Him," meaning Allah. This alternative interpretation is more consistent with the principles of *tafseer*; however, the interpretation given above is more consistent with the context of the verse. Allah knows best. In either case, though, the purport will be the same as holding fast to Him or to His revelation virtually imply one and the same meaning.

[2] Although there are numerous other interpretations for this portion of the verse, this is what has been narrated from ibn Abbaas and concluded by al-Tabari. See Abu Jafar Muhammad ibn Jareer al-Tabari, *Jaami al-Bayaan an Taweel Ayi al-Quran* (Beirut: Daar al-Fikr, 1988), vol. 10, p. 7.

[3] However, its meaning is general and is directed to every believer or every human from the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him).

would be remembered and honored for that distinction that Allah bestowed upon them.

Beyond that, though, the verse is addressing all believers and all humans and is stating the fact that one's honor, distinction or glory is found in adhering to and applying the Quran by becoming true believers in it. Allah has said,

وَلِلَّهِ الْعِزَّةُ وَلِرَسُولِهِ وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَلَكِنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ لا يَعْلَمُونَ

"Honor belongs to Allah and His Messenger, and to the Believers; but the Hypocrites know not" (*al-Munaafiqoon* 8).

This fact was demonstrated in the case of the Arabs. Before their belief in and following of the Quran, they were not a people who were known or necessarily respected throughout the world. They had little or nothing to offer the world. But after receiving the Quran, they conveyed it to the world. This was, as Sayyid Qutb pointed out, the only thought or provisions that they had to offer the world. By it, their position was exalted. They became the leaders of the East and the West.[1]

Commenting on *al-Anbiyaa* 10, "a book in which there is your honor and distinction," al-Saadi wrote,

> This verse is confirmed by what actually occurred. The believers in the Messenger, those who took heed by the Quran, from the Companions and those who came afterwards, achieved prominence, distinction, great renown and honor among the kings. Such is something well-known to everyone. Similarly, it is well-known what happened to those who did not raise their heads with the Quran and were not guided or purified through it. [They suffered from] disgrace, disdain, ignobility, and unhappiness.

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[1] Sayyid Qutb, *Fi Dhilaal al-Quran* (Cairo: Daar al-Shurooq, 1992), vol. 4, p. 2370.

> There is no way to achieve the happiness of this world nor that of the Hereafter except by following the remembrance of this Book.[1]

This principle applies to all times. If the believers want to be respected, to have honor and dignity and not live in disgrace and humiliation, Allah has shown them what they need to turn to: the Quran. If they turn to it and apply it in their lives, it will be the source of their honor and dignity in not just this temporary life but in the everlasting life in the Hereafter. Umar ibn al-Khattaab is quoted to have said about Islam itself, which directly implies the Quran also, "We were the most despised people and Allah honored us and gave us strength through Islam. And if we ever seek such honor through something other than that which Allah honored us by, Allah will then disgrace us."[2]

In fact, the Prophet (peace be upon him) himself said about the Quran,

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَرْفَعُ بِهَذَا الْكِتَابِ أَقْوَامًا وَيَضَعُ بِهِ آخَرِينَ

"Verily, Allah exalts some people by this Book and He debases others by it."[3]

In these few verses and words of Allah discussed here, one can already get a clear picture of the importance of the Quran itself. It is *the* Book that contains the needed guidance. It is the *rooh* or soul for the person. It is the light that guides the person. And it is the source of the Muslim's dignity, honor and happiness in both this life and the Hereafter.

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1 Al-Saadi, p. 468.
2 Recorded by al-Haakim who said that it is *sahih* according to Muslim and al-Bukhari's standards. See Abdul Adheem al-Mundhiri, *Al-Targheeb wa al-Tarheeb min al-Hadeeth al-Shareef* (Beirut: Daar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1986), vol. 3, pp. 559-560.
3 Recorded by Muslim and others.

There are many other descriptive names that Allah has used in reference to the Quran, such as *al-Furqaan* (the criterion between right and wrong), *al-Dhikr* (the Reminder), *al-Burhaan* (the conclusive evidence) and so on.[1]

There are also many other illuminating verses of the Quran that highlight its prominence.[2] In this brief discussion only two more sets of verses will be presented. In these verses, Allah, the Speaker of the Quran and the One who revealed the Quran— the One who truly knows the Quran— has described the Quran in a way that is nothing short of amazing for the one who reflects upon them. Allah has said,

لَوْ أَنْزَلْنَا هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ عَلَى جَبَلٍ لَرَأَيْتَهُ خَاشِعًا مُتَصَدِّعًا مِنْ خَشْيَةِ اللَّهِ وَتِلْكَ الأَمْثَالُ نَضْرِبُهَا لِلنَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

"Had We sent down this Quran on a mountain, verily, you would have seen it humble itself and cleave asunder for fear of Allah. Such are the similitudes which We propound to men, that they may reflect" (*al-Hashr* 21). Allah has also said,

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1 The number of names or descriptions that Allah has given the Quran reaches fifty-five. See Jalaal al-Deen al-Suyooti, *Al-Itqaan fi Uloom al-Quran* (Beirut: Daar al-Marifah, 1978), vol. 1, pp. 67-68.

2 The interested reader may wish to read the following verses in particular with their respective commentaries: *al-Baqarah* 98-99; *al-Baqarah* 185; *al-Baqarah* 252; *ali-Imraan* 108; *ali-Imraan* 138; *al-Nisaa* 105; *al-Maaidah* 15-16; *al-Maaidah* 48-49; *al-Maaidah* 83-85; *al-Anaam* 19; *al-Anaam* 92; *al-Anaam* 104-106; *al-Anaam* 155; *al-Araaf* 2-3; *al-Araaf* 52; *al-Araaf* 203-204; *al-Anfaal* 2; *Yoonus* 37-38; *Yoonus* 57-58; *Yoonus* 108-109; *Hood* 120; *Yoosuf* 1-3; *al-Raad* 19; *Ibraaheem* 1-3; *al-Nahl* 102; *al-Israa* 9; *al-Israa* 41; *al-Israa* 45-46; *al-Israa* 82; *al-Israa* 88-89; *al-Israa* 105-106; *Taha* 1-6; *Taha* 113-114; *al-Noor* 1; *al-Noor* 34; *al-Noor* 46; *al-Furqaan* 1; *al-Furqaan* 30-33; *al-Shuaraa* 192-202; *al-Naml* 1-6; *al-Naml* 76-77; *al-Qasas* 49-50; *al-Qasas* 51-54; *al-Qasas* 85-88; *al-Ankaboot* 47-52; *al-Room* 58; *Luqmaan* 1-5; *Faatir* 31-32; *Ya Seen* 69-70; *Saad* 29; *al-Zumar* 27-28; *al-Zumar* 32-33; *al-Zumar* 41; *Fussilat* 1-6; *Fussilat* 41-42; *Fussilat* 44; *al-Zukhruf* 1-4; *al-Zukhruf* 43-44; *al-Dukhaan* 1-8; *al-Jaathiyah* 20-22; *al-Ahqaaf* 29-32; *Muhammad* 20-31; *Qaaf* 45; *al-Qamar* 17; *al-Waaqiah* 75-80; *al-Hashr* 21; *al-Haaqah* 48-50.

وَلَوْ أَنَّ قُرْآنًا سُيِّرَتْ بِهِ الْجِبَالُ أَوْ قُطِّعَتْ بِهِ الأَرْضُ أَوْ كُلِّمَ بِهِ الْمَوْتَى بَل لِلَّهِ الأَمْرُ جَمِيعًا

"If there were a Quran with which mountains were moved, or the earth were cloven asunder, or the dead were made to speak, [this would be the one]. But, truly, the Command is with Allah in all things" (*al-Rad* 31).

Words of the Prophet (peace be upon him) about the Quran

The Prophet (peace be upon him), who received the inspiration and lived by it, also spoke about many of the important features of the Quran. Below are presented just a small sampling of his many important and illuminating statements.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) has made it clear that this Quran is a great blessing and miracle from Allah. In the following hadith, the Prophet (peace be upon him) is referring to the miracles that were given to the previous prophets. Although the miracles that were performed at their hands were something great, they cannot compare to what the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) received as his standing miracle— even the staff that was given to the Prophet Moses (peace be upon him) or the raising of the dead and healing of the blind by the Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him) cannot compare to what the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) has received in the form of the Quran. For this reason, the Prophet (peace be upon him) had reason to hope that he will have the greatest number of followers on the Day of Judgment. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said,

مَا مِنَ الأَنْبِيَاءِ نَبِيٌّ إِلاَّ أُعْطِيَ مَا مِثْلُهُ آمَنَ عَلَيْهِ الْبَشَرُ وَإِنَّمَا كَانَ الَّذِي أُوتِيتُ وَحْيًا أَوْحَاهُ اللَّهُ إِلَيَّ فَأَرْجُو أَنْ أَكُونَ أَكْثَرَهُمْ تَابِعًا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ

"There was no prophet among the prophets except that he was given something that would make the people believe in him. But what I have been given is only an inspiration that Allah has revealed to me. So I hope that I will have more followers than them on the Day of Resurrection."[1]

Another hadith sheds some light on the greatness of the Quran, which is the words and speech of Allah. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said,

فَضْلُ كَلامِ اللَّهِ عَلَى سَائِرِ الْكَلامِ كَفَضْلِ اللَّهِ عَلَى خَلْقِهِ

"The superiority of the speech of Allah over all other speech is like the superiority of Allah over His creation."[2] When a person realizes that such is the nature of the superiority of the Quran, he will definitely dedicate some of his time to read this speech and not ignore it or turn to other sources for guidance.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said about the Quran,

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1 Recorded by al-Bukhari.

2 Recorded by al-Tirmidhi, al-Daarimi and others. After a lengthy discussion, al-Huwaini concludes that the hadith is *hasan* due to its supporting evidence. See Abu Ishaaq al-Huwaini's footnotes to Ismaaeel ibn Katheer, *Kitaab Fadhaail al-Quraan* (Cairo: Maktabah ibn Taimiya, 1416 A.H.), p. 274.

ابشروا فإن هذا القرآن طرفه بيد الله وطرفه بأيديكم

فتمسكوا به فإنكم لن تهلكوا ولن تضلوا بعده أبدا

"Have glad tidings! Verily, one end of this Quran is in the hand of Allah and another end is in your hands. Adhere to it for then you will not be destroyed and you will never go astray after it."[1]

The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) also said,

يا أيها الناس إنما أنا بشر يوشك أن يأتيني رسول ربي عز

وجل فأجيب وإني تارك فيكم ثقلين أولهما كتاب الله عز

وجل فيه الهدى والنور فخذوا بكتاب الله تعالى

واستمسكوا به فحث على كتاب الله ورغب فيه

"O people, certainly I am but a human and soon a messenger from my Lord may come to me and I will respond to his call [and die]. I am leaving among you two heavy things.[2] The first of them is the Book of Allah. It contains guidance and light. The one who adheres to it and follows it will be upon guidance. The one who misses adhering to it shall go astray. Therefore, take the Book of Allah and cling to it..."[3]

Another hadith states that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said,

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1 Recorded by al-Tabaraani. According to al-Albaani, it is *sahih.* See Muhammad Naasir al-Deen al-Albaani, *Saheeh al-Jaami al-Sagheer* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islaami, 1988), vol. 1, p. 69.

2 In other words, shouldering the responsibility of these two and acting upon them is something very heavy.

3 Recorded by Ahmad with the above wording and Muslim has something very similar to it.

إنَّ لِلَّهِ أَهْلِينَ مِنَ النَّاسِ قَالُوا يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ مَنْ هُمْ قَالَ هُمْ أَهْلُ الْقُرْآنِ أَهْلُ اللَّهِ وخَاصَّتُهُ

"Certainly, Allah has special people among mankind." They asked, "O Messenger of Allah, who are they?" He replied, "They are the people of the Quran—they are the people of Allah and specially His."[1]

The Prophet (peace be upon him) also said,

خَيْرُكُمْ مَنْ تَعَلَّمَ الْقُرْآنَ وَعَلَّمَهُ

"The best of you is he who learns the Quran and teaches it to others."[2]

The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) also said about the Quran,

وَمَنْ سَلَكَ طَرِيقًا يَلْتَمِسُ فِيهِ عِلْمًا سَهَّلَ اللَّهُ لَهُ بِهِ طَرِيقًا إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ وَمَا اجْتَمَعَ قَوْمٌ فِي بَيْتٍ مِنْ بُيُوتِ اللَّهِ يَتْلُونَ كِتَابَ اللَّهِ وَيَتَدَارَسُونَهُ بَيْنَهُمْ إِلاَّ نَزَلَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ السَّكِينَةُ وَغَشِيَتْهُمُ الرَّحْمَةُ وَحَفَّتْهُمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَذَكَرَهُمُ اللَّهُ فِيمَنْ عِنْدَهُ وَمَنْ بَطَّأَ بِهِ عَمَلُهُ لَمْ يُسْرِعْ بِهِ نَسَبُهُ

"Whoever follows a path in order to seek knowledge thereby, Allah will make easy for him, due to it, a path to Paradise. No people gather together in a house of the houses of Allah,

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1 Recorded by Ahmad, ibn Maajah, al-Nasaai in *Fadhaail al-Quran* and others. According to al-Albaani, it is *sahih*. See al-Albaani, *Saheeh al-Jaami* (1988), vol. 1, p. 432.

2 Recorded by al-Bukhari.

reciting the Book of Allah and studying it among themselves, except that tranquillity is descended upon them, mercy covers them, the angels surround them and Allah makes mention of them to those in His presence. Whoever is slowed by his deeds will not be hastened forward by his lineage."[1]

The Prophet (peace be upon him) also said,

مَثَلُ الَّذِي يَقْرَأُ الْقُرْآنَ كَالأُتْرُجَّةِ طَعْمُهَا طَيِّبٌ وَرِيحُهَا طَيِّبٌ
وَالَّذِي لا يَقْرَأُ الْقُرْآنَ كَالتَّمْرَةِ طَعْمُهَا طَيِّبٌ وَلا رِيحَ لَهَا
وَمَثَلُ الْفَاجِرِ الَّذِي يَقْرَأُ الْقُرْآنَ كَمَثَلِ الرَّيْحَانَةِ رِيحُهَا طَيِّبٌ
وَطَعْمُهَا مُرٌّ وَمَثَلُ الْفَاجِرِ الَّذِي لا يَقْرَأُ الْقُرْآنَ كَمَثَلِ
الْحَنْظَلَةِ طَعْمُهَا مُرٌّ وَلا رِيحَ لَهَا

"The example of the believer who recites the Quran is like that of a citron which tastes good and smells good. And he who does not recite the Quran is like a date which is good in taste but has no smell. And the example of a hypocrite who recites the Quran is like the *raihaana* plant which smells good but tastes bitter. And the example of a hypocrite who does not recite the Quran is like the colocynth which tastes bitter and has no smell."[2]

Abdul Ghani notes how the Prophet (peace be upon him) has demonstrated the greatness and lofty nature of the Quran in this hadith: Even when it comes out of the mouth of someone who does not truly believe in it, it is described as having a good and pleasant aroma.[3]

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[1] Recorded by Muslim.

[2] Recorded by al-Bukhari.

[3] Abdul Ghani, p. 61.

Finally, another hadith demonstrates the importance of the Book of Allah in one's life: the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said,

الْقُرْآنُ حُجَّةٌ لَكَ أَوْ عَلَيْكَ

"The Quran is either an argument for or against you."[1] In this hadith, the Prophet (peace be upon him) makes it clear that the Quran is either a proof for someone or a proof against him. There is no third, neutral party. One must be from one group or the other. This is similar to what Allah has said in the Quran,

وَنُنَزِّلُ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ مَا هُوَ شِفَاءٌ وَرَحْمَةٌ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَلَا يَزِيدُ الظَّالِمِينَ إِلَّا خَسَارًا

"And We send down of the Quran that which is a healing and a mercy to those who believe. And it increases the wrongdoers nothing but loss" (*al-Israa* 82).

Statements about the Quran from Those Who Knew and Lived the Quran

Those who learned the Quran in depth and lived by its guiding light are the next people to be turned to learn more about the Quran. Foremost among this category are the Companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) who received much of their teachings of the Quran directly from the Prophet (peace be upon him).

One of the most succinct and concise descriptions of what the Quran is really meant to be comes from Ali ibn Abu

1 Recorded by Muslim.

Taalib, the Companion of the Prophet and the fourth *khaleefah* (caliph). Ali once stated,

> Stick to the Book of Allah, which speaks of those who have gone before as well as of those who will come later, and tells the truth in clear and definite terms in matters concerning which you disagree. Whosoever neglects it out of conceit shall be humiliated by Allah. And whosoever looks for guidance elsewhere shall be misled by Allah. It is the cord of Allah which shall never break, the Wise Message and the Right Path which shall never be distorted by evil minds nor corrupted by wicked tongues. Its mysteries shall never end, nor shall scholars ever be satisfied by the amount they know of it. Whoever speaks according to it has spoken the truth; whoever acts upon it shall be rewarded; whoever rules according to it does justice; and whoever calls to it shows the Straight Path.[1]

The Companion and scholar of the Quran, Abdullah ibn Masood once said, "A human should not be asked about

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[1]This statement was recorded by al-Tirmidhi as a hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him). But, in that manner, its chain is weak as al-Tirmidhi himself points out. Some hadith scholars, including ibn Katheer and al-Albaani, say that it is correctly a statement of Ali ibn Abu Talib. However, al-Huwaini points out that even in its narration as a statement of Ali, there seems to be some weakness in its chain. Furthermore, he believes that ibn Katheer's statement about the narration was not meant to mean that at the very least it must be considered a statement of Ali. Allah knows best. See al-Arnaoot's footnotes to Ali ibn Abu al-Izz, *Sharh al-Aqeedah al-Tahaawiyya* (Beirut: Muassasat al-Risaalah, 1988), vol. 1, p. 10 or al-Albaani's footnotes to a different edition of the same work, *Sharh al-Aqeeda al-Tahaawiyya* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islaami, 1984), p. 71; al-Huwaini, footnotes to ibn Katheer, *Kitaab Fadhaail*, pp. 44-48.

himself except with respect to the Quran. If he loves the Quran, then he loves Allah and His messenger."[1]

The Companion Abdullah ibn Amr stated,

> When one reads the Quran, it is as if prophethood is descending upon him except that he is not receiving revelation. Whoever reads the Quran and believes that someone has been given something better than what he has been given has made great what Allah has belittled and belittled what Allah has made great.[2]

The Companion Abdullah ibn Abbaas, for whom the Prophet (peace be upon him) prayed that Allah would teach him the Book of Allah, as recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim, said, "The bounty of Allah is Islam. And His mercy is that He made you from the people of the Quran."[3] Indeed, in the *soorah* known as *soorah al-Rahmaan*, in which Allah mentions many of the blessings that He has bestowed upon mankind, Allah begins the *soorah* by stating,

الرَّحْمَانُ عَلَّمَ الْقُرْآنَ خَلَقَ الإِنسَانَ

"The Most Beneficent Allah has taught (you mankind) the Quran (by His Mercy). He created man" (*al-Rahmaan* 1-3). In these verses, Allah refers to His beneficent act of teaching mankind the Quran before He mentions His beneficent act of creating mankind. This has been cited by some as an indication that, in reality, His merciful act of teaching the

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[1] Recorded by al-Tabaraani and others. According to al-Huwaini, the chain back to Abdullah ibn Masood is *sahih*. See al-Huwaini, footnotes to ibn Katheer, *Kitaab Fadhaail*, p. 48.

[2] This statement is recorded as a hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him) by al-Tabaraani and others. Al-Huwaini discusses its chain in detail and shows that as a statement of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him), it is a weak narration. However, it seems to be correct as a statement of the Companion Abdullah ibn Amr, as presented above in the text. See al-Huwaini, footnotes to ibn Katheer, *Kitaab Fadhaail*, pp. 296-297.

[3] Mahmood ibn Shuaib, *al-Kalimaat al-Hasaan* (Al-Jeezah, Egypt: Maktabah Ali-Yaasir, 1994), p. 9.

Quran is even more merciful than His act of creating humans. This interpretation is consistent with the statement just quoted from the scholar of the Quran Abdullah ibn Abbaas.

Uthmaan ibn Affaan and al-Hudhaifah ibn Yamaan are both reported to have said, "When the hearts become pure, they can never get enough of reading the Quran."[1]

Sufyaan al-Thauri, a student of the students of the Companions of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him), was asked which was preferred, jihad or reading the Quran. He replied that reading the Quran is preferred and, as part of his evidence, he quoted the hadith mentioned earlier,

خَيْرُكُمْ مَنْ تَعَلَّمَ الْقُرْآنَ وَعَلَّمَهُ

"The best of you is he who learns the Quran and teaches it to others."[2] Abdul Ghani has explained and supported Sufyaan's view by writing:

> There is nothing strange in Sufyaan al-Thauri (may Allah have mercy on him) giving preference to reciting the Quran over jihad. This is because jihad can be attended to by many, many people. The qualities and prerequisites for jihad are found in many among the Muslim nation. However, those who excel in reciting the Quran, being knowledgeable of its laws and being able to teach it to the Muslims are few in number. Therefore, their remaining behind and spending their time in teaching the Muslims the Book of Allah is better in their case than their going out for jihad, especially if the jihad is one which is a communal obligation and there are people attending to it. In

1 Quoted in Salaah al-Khaalidi, *Mafateeh li-l-Taammul ma al-Quraan* (Damascus: Dar al-Qalam, 1994), p. 46.

2 The hadith was recorded by al-Bukhari. The statement by Sufyaan al-Thauri may be found in Ahmad ibn Hajr, *Fath al-Baari Sharh Saheeh al-Bukhaari* (Beirut: Daar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1989), vol. 9, p. 95.

that case, the learning of the Quran and teaching it to the Muslims is in itself a type of jihad.[1]

A Muslim's Obligation Toward the Quran

One of the most important concepts in the religion of Islam is the concept of *al-walaa*. This concept implies having loyalty to Allah, loving for the sake of Allah and hating for the sake of Allah. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said,

أوثق عرى الإيمان الموالاة في الله والمعاداة في الله والحب في الله والبغض في الله

"The strongest tie of *imaan* (bond of faith) is having loyalty for the sake of Allah, disassociating from others for the sake of Allah, love for the sake of Allah and hatred for the sake of Allah."[2]

Abdul Ghani notes that one of the first obligations of this required loyalty is to have loyalty and love for the Book of Allah, which is Allah's speech and His revelation to mankind. So, first and foremost, a Muslim must have a strong love for the Quran. But this love is not simply at a theoretical level. It must be exhibited by one's actions toward the Quran. This would include reading, studying, memorizing, defending and acting in accordance with the Quran.[3]

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1 Sayyid Saeed Abdul Ghani, *Haqeeqah al-Walaa wa al-Baraa fi Mutaqad Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamaah* (Beirut: Daar ibn Hazm, 1998), p. 57.

2 Recorded by al-Tayaalisi, al-Haakim, al-Tabaraani and others. According to al-Albaani, it is *sahih*. See al-Albaani, *Saheeh al-Jaami*, vol. 1, p. 497.

3 Abdul Ghani, p. 50.

This love for the Quran should flow from one's love for Allah and His Messenger (peace be upon him). One could not possibly love Allah and not love Allah's speech and revelation to mankind. Conversely, love for the Quran implies one's love for Allah and His Messenger (peace be upon him). The Companion Abdullah ibn Masood said, "Whoever loves to know if he loves Allah and His Messenger, he should look and see for if he loves the Quran, he loves Allah and His Messenger."[1]

In addition to loving the Quran, one must be very thankful and grateful to Allah for revealing the Quran and sending His messenger (peace be upon him) to teach the Book. Allah Himself reminds the believers of this great blessing and how before its revelation, the believers did not know the truth and were astray. Allah says,

لَقَدْ مَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذْ بَعَثَ فِيهِمْ رَسُولاً مِنْ
أَنْفُسِهِمْ يَتْلُوا عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ
وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِنْ كَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلالٍ مُبِينٍ

"Allah did confer a great favor on the believers when He sent among them a Messenger from among themselves, rehearsing unto them the signs of Allah, purifying them, and instructing them in the Book and Wisdom (the sunnah), while before that, they had been clearly straying" (*ali-Imraan* 164). This gratefulness for the revealing of the Quran should be exhibited by one's study, reading and devotion to the Quran and its teachings.[2]

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[1] Recorded by al-Tabaraani. According to al-Haithami, the narrators in its chain are all trustworthy. See Abdullah al-Darweesh, *Bughyah al-Zaaid fi Tahqeeq Majma al-Zawaaid wa Manba al-Fawaaid* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1992), vol. 7, p. 342.

[2] Cf., al-Raawi, p. 77.

With respect to one's obligation toward the Quran, it is important to note the hadith of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) in which he said,

الدِّينُ النَّصِيحَةُ قُلْنَا لِمَنْ قَالَ لِلَّهِ وَلِكِتَابِهِ وَلِرَسُولِهِ وَلِأَئِمَّةِ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَعَامَّتِهِمْ

"The religion is *naseehah.*" The people said, "To whom?" The Prophet (peace be upon him) replied, "To Allah and to His Book and to His Messenger and to the Leaders of the Muslims and to the common folk of the Muslims."[1] In this hadith, the Prophet (peace be upon him) stated that one should make *naseehah* toward the book of Allah. Unfortunately, *naseehah* is a difficult word to translate. Based on the linguistic roots and the Quranic usage of the term, al-Raaghib al-Isfahaani has given the *shareeah* definition of the term as, "*Naseehah* is the seeking of an action or statement that contains goodness and improvement for the other person."[2] Ibn al-Salaah has stated that the essence of *naseehah* is where the one doing the *naseehah* (sincere well-wishing) truly seeks the best for the one to whom he is making *naseehah*. In both his intention and his actions, he desires what is best for the other person.[3]

This is how the believers' attitude must be toward the Quran. In other words, he must be acting sincerely with respect to it and doing "what is good for it," which would here imply reading it, understanding it, applying it and so forth. In a comprehensive passage, al-Maroozi has summed

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1 Recorded by Muslim.

2 Al-Raaghib al-Isfahaani *Mu'jam Mufradaat Alfaadh al-Quran* (Damascus: Daar al-Qalam, 1997), p. 808.,

3 Uthmaan Ibn al-Salaah, *Siyaanah Saheeh Muslim min al-Ikhlaal wa al-Ghalat wa Hamaayatuhu min al-Isqaat wa al-Saqat (*Beirut: Dar al-Gharab al-Islaami, 1984), p. 223.

up some of the obligatory components of making *naseehah* to the Book of Allah. He stated,

> *Naseehah* for the Book of Allah implies having a strong love for it and great respect for its worth, since it is the speech of the Creator. It also implies a strong desire to understand it and taking special care in pondering over its verses, stopping while reading it, seeking the meaning that the Lord wants one to get from it. Then one must also apply it after understanding it. The same is true when one receives *naseehah* from another human being, one tries to understand the advice that he is receiving. Similarly, if he receives something in writing from another person, he will take utmost care to understand it so that he will be able to apply the advice. The same is true for the one who is accepting the counsel of the Book of Allah; he must do his best to understand it in order to be able to apply it for the sake of Allah in a way that is both pleasing and beloved to Allah. Then he spreads among the people what he has understood from it. And he continues to study it with love for it, acting according to its manners and behaving according to its guidance.[1]

Besides what al-Maroozi mentioned, *naseehah* to the book of Allah includes having the proper belief about the Quran: That it is revealed from Allah, that it is the speech and uncreated word of Allah, and that it is not like the word of man. In addition, the complete *naseehah* to the book of Allah requires that one, according to one's ability, reads and recites it properly, applies it, studies its admonitions, lessons and parables. Calling others to believe in the book of Allah is also part of this *naseehah*.

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1 Muhammad al-Maroozi, *Tadheem Qadir al-Salaat* (Madinah: Maktabah al-Daar bi-l-Madeenah al-Munawarrah, 1406 A.H.), vol. 2, p. 693.

Another obligation that the believer has toward the Book of Allah is that he must accept the Book as the final judge and arbiter of any matter or issue. It is the law by which he abides. Whatever this Book says is lawful, he takes as lawful and whatever this Book says is unlawful, he treats as unlawful. Both "religious" and "mundane" matters must be subjected to the guidance of this Book. Allah says,

فَإِنْ تَنَازَعْتُمْ فِي شَيْءٍ فَرُدُّوهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَالرَّسُولِ إِنْ كُنتُمْ تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الآخِرِ ذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ وَأَحْسَنُ تَأْوِيلاً

"If you dispute over any matter, refer it to Allah and the Messenger if you truly believe in Allah and the Last Day. That is best and most suitable in the end" (*al-Nisaa* 59).[1]

Allah also says,

وَمَنْ لَمْ يَحْكُمْ بِمَا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْكَافِرُونَ

"If any do fail to judge by [the light of] what Allah revealed, they are unbelievers" (*al-Maaidah* 44).

On this point, Abdul Ghani wrote,

> One of the greatest demonstrations of one's loyalty to the Book of Allah is ruling by the Book of Allah. It is a clear declaration of a Muslim's loyalty to this Book... It is a practical application and actual deed demonstrating the Muslim's love for this Book and the extent to which he respects and gives honor to it... Applying the Law of Allah and ruling by His Noble Book is an obligation of the faith, a goal of the creed, and a foundation of *tauheed* (Islamic monotheism). No one would stray from it except an ignorant person

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1 The commentators agree that referring the matter to Allah means referring it to the Book of Allah while referring it to the Messenger (peace be upon him) means referring it to him while he was alive and referring it to his sunnah after his death. Cf., Ismaaeel ibn Katheer, *Tafseer al-Quran al-Adheem* (Riyadh: Dar al-Salaam, 1998), p. 338.

> whose ignorance is not to be excused, a hypocrite whose hypocrisy is well-known or a disbeliever who is rejecting the Godhood of his Lord. That is because ruling by the Book of Allah is one of the greatest acts of worship by which the human worships his Lord and it is one of the greatest acts that takes one closer to Allah.[1]

In addition to or as a subset to all of the above is the main goal of this work, which is written as an attempt to fulfill one's obligatory *naseehah* to the Book of Allah: When the Book of Allah is not being adhered to, not being read regularly or seriously, when it is being misinterpreted or misapplied, when its great wisdom is being ignored, when its laws are being usurped and man-made laws are invoked to replace it, then one must certainly stand up for the Book of Allah and try to redress this tragedy. What makes this tragedy even worse and most important to remedy is that often those who believe in the Quran take the wrong approach to it and, at the same time, think that they are showing the greatest amount of respect to the Quran. Unfortunately, their respect is sometimes misplaced. Until they fulfill these aspects mentioned above, then, in reality, they are not fulfilling their obligation of making *nasheehah* to Allah's Book.

Summary

The purpose and goal of this chapter is very clear and straightforward: It is to remind the Muslim of what the Quran is in reality. When, as Uthmaan ibn Affaan and al-Hudhaifah stated, a person whose heart is pure realizes the many important characteristics and attributes of the Quran, he will desire to read the Quran more often. He will desire to study

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1 Abdul Ghani, p. 98.

the Quran. He will zealously want to know how he is supposed to approach and understand the Quran. Then he will sincerely do his best to apply the Quran in the proper manner. When he does this, by the will of Allah, the Quran will have its desired effect on him, in the same way that it had its desired effect upon the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Chapter 3
The Quranic Generation: The Results of Approaching and Understanding the Quran Correctly

The Quran came to change the beliefs, behavior and outlook of all who are astray. It came to guide them to the true happiness and the way of life that one should follow in this life. The Quran states,

يَاأَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اسْتَجِيبُوا لِلَّهِ وَلِلرَّسُولِ إِذَا دَعَاكُمْ لِمَا يُحْيِيكُمْ

"O you who believe, respond to Allah and His messenger as they call you to that which gives you life" (*al-Anfaal* 24). Al-Suddi, an early commentator on the Quran, stated that this verse means that Islam gave the Companions true life after they were truly dead in disbelief.[1] The difference between faith and disbelief is truly comparable to the difference between life and death. Knowing the Quran, that source of life to which Allah and His Messenger (peace be upon him) is calling every human, as opposed to not knowing it is also comparable to the difference between life and death.

The effect of the Quran can clearly be seen in the first generation of Muslims. These were the people who were given life by the Quran. They were taken from darkness into light. The example they set is the example that all later generations who believe in the Quran must aspire to.

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1 Ibn Katheer, *Tafseer al-Quran al-Adheem*, p. 574.

The World Before the Advent of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)

Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, in his work *Islam and the World*, has done an admirable job of describing the situation of the world before the coming of the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him).[1] Nadwi described the plight of all of the different nations of the world. Herein, only a few passages from his description will be quoted. He begins his discussion with the following strong words,

> The sixth century of the Christian era, it is generally agreed, represented the darkest phase in the history of our race. Humanity had reached the edge of the precipice, towards which it had been tragically proceeding for centuries, and there appeared to be no agency or power in the whole world which could come to its rescue and save it from crashing into the abyss of destruction.[2]

After these words, he describes the plight of the Romans and the Persians, two of the major civilizations at that time. He said that they sunk "to a state of complete moral depravity. They wallowed in the inveterate vices of their corrupt and decaying civilizations."[3]

Perhaps religion could have been the savior for the moral situation of the people of that time. However, Christianity, the main religion of the Western power, had lost most of its original teachings. Indeed, it had become so mixed with Greek mythology, Roman idolatry, Egyptian

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[1]See Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, *Islam and the World* (International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, 1983), pp. 13-44. Nadwi has quoted a number of Western and non-Muslim sources that described the plight of mankind in the sixth and seventh centuries of the Christian era.
[2]Nadwi, p. 13.
[3]Nadwi, p. 13.

Neo-Platonism and Monasticism[1] that it itself was in need of help. For other similar reasons, Judaism and the Jews also were not in a position to offer much help to the prevailing situation.

The plight of Europe has been summed up by Robert Briffault in his *The Making of Humanity*,

> From the fifth to the tenth century Europe lay sunk in a night of barbarism which grew darker and darker. It was a barbarism far more awful and horrible than that of the primitive savage, for it was the decomposing body of what had once been a great civilization. The features and impress of that civilization were all but completely effaced. Where its development had been fullest, e.g., in Italy and Gaul, all was ruin, squalor and *dissolution.*[2]

Nadwi continues to discuss North-Western Europe, Iran, Central Asia (India) and China in some detail. He also discusses the religions of Buddhism, Hinduism and others. The plight of those areas and religions were similar to the plight of Europe and Christianity. It is not necessary to comprehensively discuss these areas and religion. It is sufficient, for the purposes here, to understand that mankind was definitely in a state of loss. There was no true light of guidance emanating from any part of the world at that time.

The plight of the Arabs, who are of more immediate concern for this work, was not much different from the rest of the world. However, their situation shall be dealt with in more detail as they are the people to whom the Quran was first presented and they are the ones who were first most affected by its teachings.

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[1]Nadwi, p. 14.
[2]Quoted in Nadwi, p. 17.

The Arabs Before the Advent of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)

The Arabs— like all other peoples at that time— had a combination of virtues and vices. However, like the others, two dangerous characteristics were present: their vices were many and their virtues were distorted.

In the opening chapter of his *The Life of Muhammad*, Abdul Hameed Siddiqui has presented an overview of the characteristics of pre-Islamic Arabs. This overview is based on pre-Islamic poetry that describes the common practices and beliefs of those days. Among their common features and attributes were: idol worship, love for sensuous pleasures, tribal pride, clan warfare, arrogance, disdain and lack of respect for women.[1]

For example, concerning their lust for sensual pleasures, Siddiqui wrote,

> Drinking had in fact become a second nature with Arabs. Wine and women go together, and as a result of licentious drinking, fornication was very rampant. The caravans which radiated from Mecca with native merchandise to the Byzantine Empire, Syria, Persia, and India, returned therefrom with all luxurious habits and vices and imported slave girls from Syria and Iraq who afforded vast opportunities of sensual pleasures to the rich with their dancing and singing and all corruption which usually goes with them. We reproduce below some of the verses which would give an idea of the immoral life which the Arabs of pre-Islamic period were habituated to lead...[2]

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[1]See Abdul Hameed Siddiqui, *The Life of Muhammad (P.B.U.H.)* (Lahore, Pakistan: Islamic Publications, Ltd. 1975), pp. 4-36.
[2]Siddiqui, *Life of Muhammad*, p. 15.

> The old Arab poetry has so many tales to narrate of the drinking orgies of the people of Arabia before the advent of Islam...[1]
>
> The heathen Arabs had little regard for the sanctity of matrimonial relations. They took pride in flouting them and describing publicly their adulterous adventures.[2]

Concerning the status of women in pre-Islamic Arabia, Siddiqui wrote, again based on evidence from pre-Islamic poetry,

> Not only were the female infants buried alive, but those who were spared, led a life of unspeakable misery and wretchedness. They were a sort of marketable commodity which could be sold in the open market to the highest bidder. At the time they were transferred to the custody of the husband their position was still worsened. Marriage for them was a kind of bondage and the marital rights of the husband were a kind of overlordship, he was free to treat and dispose of his property as he liked.[3]

The Change in the Arabs Brought about Through the Quran, by the Will of Allah

It is clear that the Arabs at the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him) were wont to drink, make merry and engage in tribal battles. They were known to sometimes kill their female babies. However, one finds that in a short span

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[1]Ibid., p. 16.
[2]Ibid., p. 17.
[3]Ibid., pp. 20-21.

of close to twenty years a movement that started with just one man was able, due to the grace of Allah and the miraculous effect of the Quran, to change almost all of the Arabs and non-Arabs in the Arabian peninsula and bind them together into a brotherhood of faith and mercy which was so strong that if any one part of this brotherhood was in anguish, the whole brotherhood would be affected negatively. At that time, one could find two people who were from previously antagonistic tribes sharing their wealth and willing to give up their lives for each other. Indeed, one was willing to split half of his wealth and divorce one of his wives for the sake of his new brother who was from a "foreign" tribe.[1]

Perhaps one of the best descriptions of the change that took place among the Muslims can be seen in the famous statement of the Companion Jafar ibn Abu Taalib who was asked by the Negus of Abyssinia about the mission of the Messenger. He told him,

> O king, we were an ignorant people, worshipping idols, eating carrion and indulging in sexual pleasures. We teased our neighbors, a brother oppressed his brother, and the strong devoured the weak. At this time a man rose among us, who had already been known to be truthful, noble and honest. This man called us to Islam. And he taught us to give up worshipping stones, to speak the truth, to refrain from bloodshed, and not to defraud the orphans of their property. He taught

1 When the Muslims migrated to Madinah, the Prophet (peace be upon him) established a bond of brotherhood between members of the new emigrants and members of the residents of Madinah. Such a bond was established between Abdul Rahmaan ibn Auf, an emigrant from Makkah, and Saad ibn al-Rabee, one of the richest people in Madinah. Saad offered to split his wealth with Abdul Rahmaan and divorce one of his two wives so that Abdul Rahman could marry one of them. Abdul Rahmaan, also in a brotherly gesture, politely turned down Saad's offer and asked Saad to point him to the market place wherein he could work to gain his own wealth and be able to marry on his own. (Recorded by al-Bukhari.)

> us to provide comfort to our neighbors and not to bring a slander against chaste women. He enjoined upon us to offer prayers, observe fasts and give alms. We followed him, gave up polytheism and idolatry and refrained from all evil deeds. It is for this new way that our people have become hostile to us and compel us to return to our old misguided life.[1]

That generation, in turn, took the message to the rest of the world. They were clearly a people who were taken from darkness into light and to the straight path of Allah. When asked by the Emperor of Persia what brought the Muslims to their lands, two different Companions answered in similar terms: "Allah has sent us to take whoever wishes from the servitude of mankind to the servitude of Allah and from the tightness of this world to its expanse and from the injustice of the ways of life [in this world] to the justice of Islam."[2]

During the lifetime of the Prophet (peace be upon him) one can see how these people were turned into a pious generation, fearing Allah and hoping for Allah's reward. Even when they, as humans, slipped and committed sins, they eagerly repented and turned to Allah for His forgiveness. They would much rather face a severe penalty in this life, such as death, than face Allah with their sins on their hands. This can be seen in the cases of Maaiz ibn Maalik al-Aslami and the woman called al-Ghaamidiyah. Both of them came to the Prophet (peace be upon him) to

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[1]The translation of this statement was taken from Allama Shibli Numani, *Sirat-un-Nabi* (Lahore, Pakistan: Kazi Publications, 1979), p. 211. The incident was recorded by ibn Ishaq in *al-Maghazi* and Ahmad. And its chain is *sahih* according to al-Albaani. See al-Albaani's footnotes to Muhammad al-Ghazaali, *Fiqh al-Seera* (Qatar: Idaarah Ihyaa al-Turaath al-Islaami, n.d.), p. 126.

[2]Ismaaeel ibn Katheer, *Al-Bidaayah wa al-Nihaayah* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, n.d.), vol. 7, pp. 39-40.

admit that they had committed adultery and each asked the Prophet (peace be upon him) for the worldly punishment of stoning to death to erase their sins. In the case of al-Ghaamidiyah, the Prophet (peace be upon him) asked her to go back after her confession and to return to the Prophet (peace be upon him) after she had given birth. She came back with her child in her arms and asked the Prophet (peace be upon him) to purify her from her sins. The Prophet (peace be upon him) then asked her to return after she had weaned the child. Then she returned after some time and told the Prophet (peace be upon him) that the child was no longer in need of her breastfeeding. She once again asked for her expiation from her sin. Then, finally, the Prophet (peace be upon him) had a ditch dug for her and she was stoned to death as an expiation for her sin of adultery. The Prophet (peace be upon him) then praised her act of repentance.[1]

The effect of this change in the Companions continued long after the death of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Note the following accounts of the Companions as they sought to spread the message of Islam to the rest of the world:

> The sterling character and qualities of the Muslim soldiers were once praised by a Roman officer in these words: "At night you will find them prayerful; during the day you will find them fasting. They keep their promises, order good deeds, suppress evil and maintain complete equality among themselves."
>
> Another testified thus: "They are horsemen by day and ascetics by night. They pay for what they eat in territories under their occupation. They are first to salute when they arrive at a place and are valiant fighters who just wipe out the enemy."

[1]The story of both Maaiz and al-Ghaamidiyyah are recorded by Muslim.

> A third said: "During the night it seems that they do not belong to this world and have no other business than to pray, and during the day, when one sees them mounted on their horses, one feels that they have been doing nothing else all their lives. They are great archers and great lancers, yet they are so devoutly religious and remember God so much and so often that one can hardly hear talk about anything else in their company."[1]

Was the Prophet (peace be upon him) the Key?

Perhaps, it could be argued, that the key to that generation's development was the Prophet's (peace be upon him) existence, teaching and leadership. Hence, the Prophet (peace be upon him) being among them was what led to their great transformation. There is no question that the Prophet (peace be upon him) and the example that he set had a great influence on his followers. However, that does not necessarily imply that his actual presence among the people is required for the Quran to have its intended effect. The Quran can have a similar effect on any later generation even in the absence of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Sayyid Qutb has touched on this point in *Milestones*. He makes the following conclusion,

> The Quran which enshrines this Message is still in our hands, and the hadith of the Messenger of Allah, peace be on him, his guidance in practical affairs, and the history of his sacred life are also in tact, as they were in the hands of the first Muslim community whose likes history could never again produce. The only difference is the absence of the Messenger of Allah, peace be on

[1]Quoted from Nadwi, p. 81. Also see ibn Katheer, *al-Bidaayah*, vol. 7, p. 53.

> him; but is this the secret? Had the person of the Prophet, peace be on him, been absolutely essential for the establishment and fruition of this message, Allah would not have made Islam a universal message, ordained it as the religion for the whole of mankind, given it the status of the last Divine Message for humanity, and made it to be a guide for all the inhabitants of this planet in their affairs until the end of time.
>
> Allah has taken the responsibility for preserving the Noble Quran on Himself because He knows that Islam can be established and can benefit mankind even after the time of the Prophet, peace be on him. Hence He called His Prophet, peace be on him, back to His mercy after twenty three years of messengership and declared this religion to be valid until the end of time. The absence of the Messenger of Allah, peace be on him, is not the real cause or explanation of this phenomenon.[1]

The Quran and the Prophet (peace be upon him) were emphatic that the presence of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) himself is not necessary for the teachings of Islam to guide mankind and have its intended effect on humans. Allah states in the Quran, while talking about the Quran itself,

يَاأَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ قَدْ جَاءكُمْ رَسُولُنَا يُبَيِّنُ لَكُمْ كَثِيرًا مِمَّا كُنْتُمْ تُخْفُونَ مِنْ الْكِتَابِ وَيَعْفُو عَنْ كَثِيرٍ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ نُورٌ وَكِتَابٌ مُبِينٌ يَهْدِي بِهِ اللَّهُ مَنْ اتَّبَعَ رِضْوَانَهُ سُبُلَ

[1]Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1990), pp. 11-12.

السَّلامِ وَيُخْرِجُهُمْ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَيَهْدِيهِمْ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ

"O People of the Book! There has come to you Our Messenger, revealing to you much that you used to hide in the Book, and passing over much (that is now unnecessary). There has come to you from Allah a (new) light and a perspicuous Book. Wherewith Allah guides all who seek His good pleasure to ways of peace and safety, and leads them out of darkness, by His will, unto the light guiding them to a path that is straight" (*al-Maaidah* 15-16). This verse clearly states that the Quran by its own being— which is the guidance for all of mankind until the Day of Judgment— takes people from darkness into light.[1] The Prophet (peace be upon him) said,

وَقَدْ تَرَكْتُ فِيكُمْ مَا لَنْ تَضِلُّوا بَعْدَهُ إِنِ اعْتَصَمْتُمْ بِهِ كِتَابَ اللَّهِ

"I have certainly left among something after which you will never go astray as long as you adhere to it: It is the Book of Allah."[2]

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[1]Note that the Quran commands one to follow the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him) but at no time hints that the existence of the Prophet (peace be upon him) himself is necessary.

[2]Recorded by Muslim. By the mercy of Allah, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) left behind two sources of guidance that go hand and hand in guiding Muslims and keeping them from straying. In another hadith, the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said, تَرَكْتُ فِيكُمْ أَمْرَيْنِ لَنْ تَضِلُّوا مَا تَمَسَّكْتُمْ بِهِمَا كِتَابَ اللَّهِ وَسُنَّةَ نَبِيِّهِ "I have left among you two matters, that if you adhere to them, you will never be misguided: the book of Allah and the sunnah of His Prophet." (Recorded by Malik.) The Quran itself indicates the importance and necessity of following the sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Hence, the hadith presented in this footnote

Hence, as Muhammad Qutb pointed out, the living presence of the Prophet (peace be upon him) is not a precondition for the development of a pure Muslim society. However, in a sense, although the Prophet (peace be upon him) is physically dead, he still lives on because his example and teachings have been so clearly and immaculately preserved that anyone can look to his teachings and guidance today in the same way that they looked to him during his lifetime.[1] This aspect of the Prophet's (peace be upon him) example Allah has preserved like He has preserved the Quran. Hence, it will always be there for people to turn to in the way that it was there for the first generation to turn to.

The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) has died. His physical presence in every generation is not needed in order for people to know or follow the truth. Additionally, his death is no excuse for anyone to turn away from the Quran and the truth that he brought. Allah says,

وَمَا مُحَمَّدٌ إِلاَّ رَسُولٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ الرُّسُلُ أَفَإِيْن
مَاتَ أَوْ قُتِلَ انْقَلَبْتُمْ عَلَى أَعْقَابِكُمْ وَمَنْ يَنْقَلِبْ عَلَى عَقِبَيْهِ
فَلَنْ يَضُرَّ اللَّهَ شَيْئًا

"Muhammad is but a messenger. Many were the messengers that went before him. If he were to die or be slain, would you then turn back on your heels [and refuse to follow the guidance of the Quran and his sunnah]? If anyone did turn back on his heels, he would harm Allah in the least" (*ali-Imraan* 144).

If this were not the case, since Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was the final prophet and messenger,

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and the hadith presented in the text above are completely consistent and do not contradict each other.

[1] See Muhammad Qutb, *Minhaaj al-Tarbiyyah al-Islaamiyyah* (Beirut: Daar al-Shurooq, 1981), vol. 2, pp. 17-18.

Allah would have allowed him to live until the Day of Judgment in order for there to be no argument (Ar., *hujjah*) from mankind against Allah on the Day of Judgment. Mankind could have claimed that Allah had not given them or preserved for them what they needed for proper guidance.

But the Quran is still existent today in its original form and the sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) has also been preserved. Why then is there such a disparity between the situation of today's believers in the Quran and those of the past who also believed in the Quran? This is the question that needs to be dealt with next.

Why Doesn't the Quran Have the Same Effect Today?

William Ewart Gladstone, four-time Prime Minister of Great Britain, is famous for telling the English Parliament, "As long as this Quran exists, Europe will never be able to conquer the Islamic East." Similarly, the French Colonial Governor of Algeria said, on the occasion of one hundred years of French occupation of Algeria, "It is a must to remove the Arabic Quran from their presence and to remove the Arabic language from their tongues in order for us to have victory over them."[1]

Actually, many of the enemies of Islam have perceived an even more important point: It is not necessary to physically remove the Quran from the hands of the Muslims. They only need to remove the Quran from being central to the life of the Muslim. It is possible for people—Muslims— to possess the Quran and still not receive the

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[1] Both quotes may be found in Nabeeh Zakariyyah Abd Rabbihi, *Kaifa Nahyaa bi-l-Quran* (Al-Dauha: Daar al-Haramain li-l-Nashir, 1983), p. 138.

benefits, guidance and blessings that should go hand in hand with the Quran.

The reason why the Quran does not have the same effect today has nothing to do with the essential nature of the Quran— as it will always be the true guidance that is ever available to take mankind from darkness into light. The source of the problem is in the way that many of today's believers approach the Quran. The possible reasons for this kind of situation could be many. In general, though, four, which were mentioned in the introductory chapter, stand out glaringly:

(1) Some Muslims emphasize secondary aspects of the Quran while ignoring its more important primary aspects;

(2) Related to (1), too many Muslims do not recognize and understand the primary goals of the Quran; therefore, they read it but do not get out of it what it desires for them;

(3) In addition, some Muslims do not approach the Quran in the proper manner, missing the essential link between what it teaches and how it is to affect mankind; and

(4) Even when the above obstacles or problems are overcome, still some Muslims do not interpret the Quran in the proper manner and, hence, although they read it they do not get its correct teachings from it.

These issues are truly the heart of the matter. They are discussed separately and in detail in the following chapters.

The Eternal Result of Following the Quran Sincerely for Allah's Sake

The reader has no doubt noticed that the preceding portion of this chapter has been only related to the effect of the Quran with respect to this worldly life. Before moving

on, it is important to realize the eternal effect of adhering to the Quran. This eternal effect is, in reality, much more significant and important than the effect of the Quran in this world— however, both aspects are extremely important. The Quran has been revealed to guide man in his affairs in this life so that he will be beloved to Allah and guided to Allah's mercy and paradise in the Hereafter. If the worldly results of following the Quran are not as they should be, it must be considered a sign that the Quran is not being approached, understood and followed in the correct manner. If this is the case, then one may achieve neither the worldly benefits or effects of the Quran nor, and this is even more disastrous, receive the benefits of the Quran in the Hereafter.

The Quran is part of that guidance that Allah has sent to mankind that is referred to in the following verse:

فَمَنْ تَبِعَ هُدَايَ فَلا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَكَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا أُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

"For whosoever shall follow My guidance,[1] there shall have no fear over them nor shall they grieve. As for the disbelievers and those who belie Our signs, they are the inhabitants of the Fire wherein they shall abide" (*al-Baqarah* 38-39). The reward for following the Quran is, as ibn Abbaas stated, that the person will not go astray in this world nor will he be miserable in the Hereafter. The person will not have to fear about what he is about to face nor shall he grieve concerning what occurred in the past. The Quran is *noor* (a light) as mentioned earlier. However, the one who refuses to follow that light will be rewarded with *naar* (Fire).

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[1] According to al-Hasan, the meaning of "My guidance" in this verse is specifically the Quran. See Ibn Katheer, *Tafseer al-Quran al-Adheem*, p. 63.

Similarly, ibn Abbaas stated, "Allah has guaranteed for whoever reads the Quran and acts upon it that he shall never go astray in this life nor will he suffer misery in the next life." Then he read the following Quranic verses,

قَالَ اهْبِطَا مِنْهَا جَمِيعًا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ فَإِمَّا يَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ مِنِّي هُدًى فَمَنْ اتَّبَعَ هُدَايَ فَلا يَضِلُّ وَلا يَشْقَى وَمَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَنْ ذِكْرِي فَإِنَّ لَهُ مَعِيشَةً ضَنكًا وَنَحْشُرُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ أَعْمَى قَالَ رَبِّ لِمَ حَشَرْتَنِي أَعْمَى وَقَدْ كُنتُ بَصِيرًا قَالَ كَذَلِكَ أَتَتْكَ آيَاتُنَا فَنَسِيتَهَا وَكَذَلِكَ الْيَوْمَ تُنسَى

"If there comes to you from Me a guidance, then whosoever follows My guidance, he will not go astray nor come to grief. But whoever turns away from My message, he shall have a life narrowed down, and We shall raise him blind on the Day of Judgement. He will say, 'O my Lord, why have You raised me blind while I had sight before?' God will say, 'Thus did you disregard Our verses when they came to you so will you this day be disregarded'" (*Taha* 123-126).[1] That is, whoever turns to the Quran sincerely, learns it correctly and applies it in his life follows the straight path blessed by Allah in both this life and the Hereafter.

Allah also says,

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[1]Quoted in Ali ibn Abu al-Izz, *Sharh al-Aqeedah al-Tahaawiyya* (Beirut: Muassasat al-Risaalah, 1988), vol. 1, p. 9.

إِنَّ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ يَهْدِي لِلَّتِي هِيَ أَقْوَمُ وَيُبَشِّرُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ الَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ الصَّالِحَاتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ أَجْرًا كَبِيرًا وأَنَّ الَّذِينَ لا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالآخِرَةِ أَعْتَدْنَا لَهُمْ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا

"Verily this Quran does guide to that which is most right (or stable), and gives the glad tidings to the Believers who work deeds of righteousness, that they shall have a magnificent reward. And to those who believe not in the Hereafter, (it announces) that We have prepared for them a Penalty Grievous (indeed)" (*Israa* 9-10).

The believing and following of this Quran is the key to Allah's mercy. Allah says,

وَهَذَا كِتَابٌ أَنزَلْنَاهُ مُبَارَكٌ فَاتَّبِعُوهُ وَاتَّقُوا لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ

"And this is a Book which We have revealed as a blessing: so follow it and be righteous, that you may receive mercy" (*al-Anaam* 155).

The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said about the Quran,

القُرآنُ شَافِعٌ مُشَفَّعٌ وماحِلٌ مُصَدَّقٌ مَنْ جعلهُ أمامَهُ قادَهُ إلى الجنةِ ومَنْ جَعَلَهُ خلفهُ ساقَهُ إلى النارِ

"The Quran is an intercessor who intercession is accepted and a litigant who is believed. For the one who places it in front of him [being guided by it], it will lead him to Paradise. And for the one who places it behind him [ignoring its guidance], it will drive him to the Hell-Fire."[1] Al-Munaawi,

[1] Recorded by ibn Hibbaan and al-Baihaqi on the authority of Jaabir and recorded by al-Tabaraani and al-Baihaqi on the authority of ibn Masood. According to al-Albaani and Abdul Qaadir al-Arnaoot, it is *sahih*. Al-Huwaini states that this is narrated as a statement of Abdullah ibn Masood

while commenting on this hadith, stated that if a person is not leading his life by the guidance and principles found in the Quran, he must be leading his life by some other principles. Hence, he is deserving of the Hell-fire. On the other hand, if he is abiding by the Quran, the Quran will lead him to Paradise.[1]

As noted earlier, the Quran will be a proof for or against a person on the Day of Judgment. In another hadith, the Prophet (peace be upon him) described how the Quran will come to the aid of those who acted according to it in this life. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said,

يُؤْتَى بِالْقُرْآنِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَأَهْلِهِ الَّذِينَ كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ بِهِ
تَقْدُمُهُ سُورَةُ الْبَقَرَةِ وَآلُ عِمْرَانَ وَضَرَبَ لَهُمَا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ
صَلَّى اللَّهم عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ ثَلاثَةَ أَمْثَالٍ مَا نَسِيتُهُنَّ بَعْدُ قَالَ

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through *sahih* chains but as a narration of the Prophet (peace be upon him), there is some strong weakness to it. On the other hand, Musfir al-Ghaamdi concludes that even if it is a statement of ibn Masood, it is considered as having its source with the Prophet (peace be upon him). In sum, it is either an acceptable hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him) or a statement of Abdullah ibn Masood, one of the Companions. If it is the latter case, one could argue that it must have originated with the Prophet (peace be upon him). In any case, from the discussion of the above scholars, it seems that the stronger opinion is that it is a hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and not a statement of Abdullah ibn Masood. Allah knows best. Cf., See Muhammad Naasir al-Deen al-Albaani, *Silsilat al-Ahaadeeth al-Saheehah* (Riyadh: Maktab al-Maarif, 1991), vol. 5, pp. 31-32; Abdul Qaadir al-Arnaaoot, "Introduction" to Ismaaeel ibn Katheer, *Tafseer al-Quran al-Adheem* (Riyadh: Daar al-Salaam, 1998), p. 9; al-Huwaini's footnotes to ibn Katheer, *Kitaab Fadhaail al-Quraan*, pp. 281-282; Musfir al-Ghaamdi's footnotes to Muhammad al-Dharees, *Fadhaail al-Quran* (Daar Haafidh, 1988), pp. 105-107.

[1] Abdul Raoof al-Munaawi, *Faidh al-Qadeer Sharh al-Jaami al-Sagheer* (Beirut: Daar al-Marifah, 1972), vol. 4, p. 535.

كَأَنَّهُمَا غَمَامَتَانِ أَوْ ظُلَّتَانِ سَوْدَاوَانِ بَيْنَهُمَا شَرْقٌ أَوْ كَأَنَّهُمَا حِزْقَانِ مِنْ طَيْرٍ صَوَافَّ تُحَاجَّانِ عَنْ صَاحِبِهِمَا

"The Quran will be brought on the Day of Resurrection along with its people who used to act according to it with *soorah*s *al-Baqarah* and *ali-Imraan* preceding them." The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) likened them to three things which I [the narrator al-Nawwaas ibn Samaan] did not forget afterwards. He said, "They are like two clouds or two black canopies with light between them or like two flocks of birds in ranks pleading for one who recited them."[1]

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said,

يُقَالُ لِصَاحِبِ الْقُرْآنِ اقْرَأْ وَارْتَقِ وَرَتِّلْ كَمَا كُنْتَ تُرَتِّلُ فِي الدُّنْيَا فَإِنَّ مَنْزِلَتَكَ عِنْدَ آخِرِ آيَةٍ تَقْرَأُ بِهَا

"It will be said to the companion of the Quran, 'Read, ascend and recite as you recited in the world for your place will be at the end of what you used to recite.'"[2]

In *al-Anaam*, verse 92, Allah describes the Quran as blessed in a comprehensive sense. Indeed, its blessings are continual and perpetual for the one who earnestly and sincerely seeks them. It blesses the person in this life by guiding him to the straight path. It blesses the person while he is in his grave by protecting him from punishment therein. And it blesses the person in the Hereafter by coming as an

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1 Recorded by Muslim.

2 Recorded by Ahmad, al-Tirmidhi, Abu Dawood and others. According to Ahmad Shaakir and Naasir al-Deen al-Albaani, its chain is *sahih*. See Ahmad Shaakir, footnotes to Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *al-Musnad* (Cairo: Daar al-Hadeeth, 1995), vol. 9, pp. 388-389; Muhammad Naasir al-Deen al-Albaani, *Saheeh Sunan Abi Dawood* (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Tarbiyyah al-Arabi li-Duwal al-Khaleej, 1989), vol. 1, p. 275.

intercessor and pleading for the one who read and lived by it. Indeed, it blesses the person by elevating his rank in the Hereafter.[1]

Summary

Al-Khaalidi noted through the blessings and guidance of the Quran Allah made a generation from "non-existence," as he put it, solely based on and inspired by the teachings of that Quran.[2] No one could have imagined that these people, the Arabs, would become leaders of the world and cornerstones of a civilization whose influence would remain for centuries to come. The names of the individuals of that generation which Allah brought up under the light of guidance of the Quran, both men and women, are still remembered with reverence throughout the world today. Theirs is the example that all those who read the Quran should aspire to. In the Hereafter, Allah will again show His pleasure for them by entering them into Paradise. That is the eternal goal that all who read the Quran should long for.

1 Cf., al-Raawi, p. 119.
2 Salaah al-Deen Al-Khaalidi, *Mafaateeh Li-ltaamal Ma al-Quran* (Jordan: Maktaba al-Manar, 1985), p.84.

Chapter 4
Emphasizing Secondary Aspects of the Quran: How Many Muslims Currently Approach the Quran

Allah says in the Quran,

وَقَالَ الرَّسُولُ يَارَبِّ إِنَّ قَوْمِي اتَّخَذُوا هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ مَهْجُورًا

"The Messenger said, 'O Lord, my people have taken this Quran as something *mahjoor* (to be avoided or shunned)'" (*al-Furqaan* 30). One can reasonably argue that many of the Messenger's (peace be upon him) people today— that is, his followers— are treating the Quran as something to be shunned. Yes, no Muslim would ever do such a thing intentionally. However, a Muslim may do this without realizing what he is doing; and that is where the real problem lies.

There are many ways by which a people may take the Quran as something *mahjoor*. Ibn al-Qayyim notes the following ways by which people take the Quran as something to be avoided or shunned:

(1) Avoiding listening to its recitation, believing in it or paying attention or inclining to it.

(2) Avoiding acting by and respecting what the Quran states as permissible or forbidden, even though the person reads it or believes in it.

(3) Avoiding accepting the Quran as the arbiter or judging by it in the fundamental as well as secondary aspects

of the religion or believing that it does not warrant certainty of belief in it.

(4) Avoiding pondering over its meanings, understanding it and knowing what Allah desires from the reader.

(5) Avoiding using it as a healing and cure for the diseases of the heart while seeking the cure for such diseases from other sources.[1]

Another important way, besides the above mentioned by ibn al-Qayyim, by which one takes the Quran as something *mahjoor*—and a very dangerous way because the person may not realize it or may not be willing to admit it—is to only emphasize or concentrate on the secondary aspects of the Quran and to ignore its main goals and purposes.

Muslims turn to the Quran for many reasons. But it seems, Allah knows best, that one of the main reasons why the Muslims are not receiving the entire guidance from the Quran is that they are emphasizing aspects of it that are not the main reasons for which it was revealed. Discussed in this chapter are some valid and important aspects of the Quran but, at the same time, they are not its essential purpose. If Muslims only emphasize these secondary aspects of the Quran, they may never find its true message.

Not Reading the Quran

There are many Muslims who believe in and apply the Quran, however, they do not regularly sit and read it. They may have enough of it memorized to perform their prayers, but beyond that they do not have much knowledge of the Quran. This lackadaisical approach to reading the Quran is, unfortunately, not that uncommon. In fact, the

[1]Muhammad ibn al-Qayyim, *al-Fawaaid* (Beirut: Daar al-Nafaais, 1984), pp. 107-108.

Standing Committee of Scholarly Research and Religious Rulings in Saudi Arabia received the following question and others similar to it:

> What is the ruling concerning reading the Quran, is it obligatory or recommended, as we have asked about its ruling and some have said that it is not obligatory. [In other words] if a person reads it, there is no harm and if he does not read it, there is no [sin] upon him. If that were the case, then many would leave it. So what is the ruling concerning avoiding it and what is the ruling concerning reading it?

The response of the committee made up of Abdul Azeez ibn Baaz, Abdul Razzaaq al-Afeefi, Abdullah ibn Ghudyaan and Abdullah ibn Qaood was,

> What is legislated with respect to a Muslim is for him to keep up in reciting the Quran and to recite it often according to his ability, in compliance with the generalness of the command in Allah's words, "Recite what is sent of the Book by inspiration to you" [*al-Ankaboot* 45], "Recite what has been revealed to you of the Book of your Lord" [*al-Kahf* 27], and His statement about His Prophet (peace be upon him), "I have been commanded to be among those who submit [to Allah] and to recite the Quran" [*al-Naml* 91-92]. The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) also said, "Recite the Quran for it will come as one who intercedes for its companion on the Day of Resurrection." Recorded by Muslim in his *Sahih*. [The Muslim must also] avoid any form of avoiding and cutting off from it in any of the forms of avoiding it as mentioned by the scholars. [Then the reply quotes ibn Katheer's commentary

to *al-Furqaan* and the meaning of *mahjoor* similar to the discussion given above].[1]

There is no question that the one who believes in the Quran and applies it whenever he is told of what it contains is in a better position than one who reads the Quran and does not apply it. Indeed, he is even in a better position than the one who memorizes the Quran yet does not apply it. However, he may be missing the great effects that the Quran could have on his faith and his life. By constantly reading the Quran, even the same *soorahs* over and over again, one may be enlightened and get some insights that he would have missed otherwise. Hence, those who believe in the Quran and apply it yet do not take the time to read it are perhaps preventing themselves from getting even greater benefit from the Quran. Such people should turn to the Quran and read it and allow it to have its full effect upon them and try to gain as much guidance from it that they can.

Furthermore, when one does not read the Quran on a regular basis, it becomes easy for him to forget some of the teachings of the Quran or he may remember those that he applies on a regular basis but he may forgot those that he needs for specific occasions. In fact, the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said,

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1 Ahmad ibn Abdul Razaaq al-Darweesh, ed., *Fataawaa al-Lajnah al-Daaimah li-l-Buhooth al-Ilmiyyah wa al-Iftaa* (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Maarif, 1412 A.H.), vol. 4, pp. 66-7. It may be the case that some sincere Muslims find it difficult to read the Quran. Saalih al-Fauzaan was asked the following question, "I try to read the Noble Quran and I very much love the Book of Allah but I find it very difficult for me. I am not able to complete the recitation. What is the solution?" Al-Fauzaan replied that first the person must seek refuge in Allah from the accursed Satan, as Allah has mentioned in *al-Nahl* 98-100 (and which shall be discussed later in this work). That is a most important first step. Secondly, the person should not simply read the Quran but he should study it and ponder over its meaning. This will increase his fear of Allah and his desire to read more of the Quran. The reader's concern should not be to finish a certain portion of the Quran or a certain *soorah* but it should be to read, understand and ponder over the meanings of the verses. Al-Fauzaan, vol. 2, p. 306.

تَعَاهَدُوا هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ فَوَالَّذِي نَفْسُ مُحَمَّدٍ بِيَدِهِ لَهُوَ أَشَدُّ تَفَلُّتًا مِنَ الإِبِلِ فِي عُقُلِهَا

"Attend to this Quran [and keep refreshing your knowledge of it] for by the One in whose hand is the soul of Muhammad it is more liable to escape [from one's mind] than a camel that is tied down."[1] Based on this hadith, al-Fauzaan concludes that a Muslim should recite the entire Quran, at the minimum, at least once a month.[2] Allah knows best.

Possessing or Reading the Quran for the Sake of *Baraka* (Blessings) Without the Complete Intention to Act upon Its Teachings

There is no question that blessings may descend upon the person who reads the Quran— unfortunately, though, as one looks around the Muslim world witnessing people reading the Quran in the mosques, seeing the Quran recited to begin meetings and conferences, seeing the Quran recited at wedding ceremonies, seeing the Quran used to begin and end the broadcast day on television or radio or seeing the Quran recited over a deceased, one gets the strong feeling that the main reason that the Quran is resorted to today among Muslims is exactly this purpose: for the sake of getting blessings from the Quran.

There is no doubt that blessings may descend upon a person due to his reading of the Quran. The following hadith demonstrate that fact: The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) stated,

1 Recorded by Muslim.
2 Al-Fauzaan, vol. 2, p. 296.

أَيُّكُمْ يُحِبُّ أَنْ يَغْدُوَ كُلَّ يَوْمٍ إِلَى بُطْحَانَ أَوْ إِلَى الْعَقِيقِ فَيَأْتِيَ مِنْهُ بِنَاقَتَيْنِ كَوْمَاوَيْنِ فِي غَيْرِ إِثْمٍ وَلا قَطْعِ رَحِمٍ فَقُلْنَا يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ نُحِبُّ ذَلِكَ قَالَ أَفَلا يَغْدُو أَحَدُكُمْ إِلَى الْمَسْجِدِ فَيَعْلَمُ أَوْ يَقْرَأُ آيَتَيْنِ مِنْ كِتَابِ اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ خَيْرٌ لَهُ مِنْ نَاقَتَيْنِ وَثَلاثٌ خَيْرٌ لَهُ مِنْ ثَلاثٍ وَأَرْبَعٌ خَيْرٌ لَهُ مِنْ أَرْبَعٍ وَمِنْ أَعْدَادِهِنَّ مِنَ الإِبِلِ

"Which of you would like to go out every morning to Buthaan or al-Aqeeq[1] and bring back two camels without committing any sin or cutting the ties of kinship?" We [the Companions] said, "We would love to do that." He then said, "Don't you go to the mosque and teach or read two verses from the Book of Allah, the Majestic and Glorious, and that is better for the person than two camels; and three [verses] is better for him than three [camels]; and four [verses] is better for him than four [camels] and so on."[2]

Usaid ibn Hudhair stated that he was reciting *soorah al-Baqarah* at night with his horse tied down next to him. The horse stirred, so he stopped reading and the horse stopped moving. Then he read again and the horse once again jolted. He stopped reading and the horse once again became still. Again he read and again the horse stirred. So he stopped reading and the horse became calm. He decided to leave because his son Yahya was close to him and he was afraid something might happen to him. When he took the boy away and looked toward the sky, he could not see skies. The next morning, he told the Prophet (peace be upon him) about what

1 These were two places outside of Madinah in which camel markets were held.

2 Recorded by Muslim.

occurred. The Prophet (peace be upon him) told him, "Recite, O ibn Hudhair, recite O ibn Hudhair." Ibn Hudhair replied, "But I was afraid for Yahya, O Messenger of Allah, as the horse was close to him, so I raised my head and went to him. When I raised my head and look toward the sky, I saw a cloud containing what looked like lamps. So I went out in order not to see that." The Prophet (peace be upon him) told him, "Do you know what that was?" Ibn Hudhair replied, "No." He told him, "Those were the angels coming close to your voice. Had you kept reciting till morning, the people would have seen it and they would not have disappeared."[1]

Something similar to what happened to ibn Hudhair also happened to al-Baraa. In his case, the Prophet (peace be upon him) told him that the cloud he saw that was frightening his horse was the tranquility that descends with the reading of the Quran.[2]

Furthermore, there is a special reward for reading the Quran. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said,

مَنْ قَرَأَ حَرْفًا مِنْ كِتَابِ اللَّهِ فَلَهُ بِهِ حَسَنَةٌ وَالْحَسَنَةُ بِعَشْرِ أَمْثَالِهَا لا أَقُولُ الم حَرْفٌ وَلَكِنْ أَلِفٌ حَرْفٌ وَلامٌ حَرْفٌ وَمِيمٌ حَرْفٌ

"Whoever reads a *harf* [word or letter] of the Book of Allah shall have a good deed [recorded for him] and every good deed receives a tenfold [reward]. I do not say that *Alif Laam Meem* is a *harf* but *alif* is a *harf*, *laam* is a *harf* and *meem* is a *harf*."[3]

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[1] Recorded by al-Bukhari in *mualaq* form and by Muslim.
[2] Recorded by Muslim.
[3] Recorded by al-Tirmidhi and others. According to al-Albaani, it is *sahih*. See al-Albaani, *Saheeh al-Jaami*, vol. 2, pp. 1103-1104.

No one can doubt that this is a true characteristic of reading the Quran that every Muslim must believe in. However, suppose someone reads the Quran just for the sake of reading it and hoping to achieve these blessings.[1] That is, his sole purpose is to receive the ten rewards for each letter he recites or he is in search of tranquility to come over him. He does not go beyond that mere superficial reading and try to discover what Allah is asking from him in the Quran. Is such a person actually reading the Quran in the proper manner? Has he understood what the Quran is actually intended for?

Al-Ghazaali includes the person who reads in this nature as someone who is getting nothing from his reading but the movement of his tongue.[2] How could a person read the verses that discuss, for example, the harm of disobeying Allah and not have any feeling of fear in his heart? If a person is reading the Quran in that manner, one cannot even truly say that he is reading it, in the sense that if one reads a sign and has not comprehended anything the sign says, then he has not actually read the sign.

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1 Some people simply "possess" the Quran, without reading it, supposedly for the sake of blessings. Abdul Azeez Mustafa describes this, what he calls a common practice today, as one of the horrendous ways in which the Quran is being abandoned and avoided. People put their copy of the Quran on a mantle or in the front or back of their cars and the copy becomes filled with dust witnessing that it is in fact being avoided and abandoned. See Abdul Azeez Mustafa, *Sharh Asbaab al-Asharah al-Moojibah li-Muhibbah Allah kamaa Adaha al-Imaam ibn al-Qayyim* (Riyadh: Daar Taibah, 1415 A.H.), p. 31.

2 Cf., Muhammad al-Zabeedi, *Itihaaf al-Saadah al-Muttaqeen bi-Sharh Ihyaa Uloom al-Deen* (Beirut: Daar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1989), vol. 5, p. 113. Al-Ghazaali includes those who read the Quran in this manner as among those people referred to in the verse, "And there are among them illiterates, who know not the Book, but (see therein their own) desires, and they do nothing but conjecture" (*al-Baqarah* 78). According to al-Ghazaali, this verse means that they simply know how to read or recite the book but they do not know its actual meaning. Cf., al-Zabeedi, vol. 5, p. 115.

The Companion Anas ibn Maalik stated, "Perhaps one is reciting the Quran and the Quran is cursing him."[1] In other words, he is reading the words of Allah, such as the following,

أَلا لَعْنَةُ اللّٰهِ عَلَى الظَّالِمِينَ

"Certainly, Allah's curse is upon the wrongdoers" (*Hood* 18), while he himself is one of the wrongdoers referred to in the verse due to his lack of applying what he is reading.[2]

Indeed, those who recite the Quran with their tongues only supposedly for the sake of blessings while never taking the time to understand and apply the Quran are very much akin to another people whom Allah describes in the Quran:

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[1] This is a well-known statement. It is quoted in Abdul Hameed ibn Baadees, *Tafseer ibn Baadees fi Majaalis al-Tadhkeer min Kalaam al-Hakeem al-Khabeer* (Beirut: Daar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1995), p. 35.

[2] Unfortunately, this correct concept has led some to go to the opposite extreme. For example, Yoosuf ibn Asbaat al-Shaibaani is quoted to have said, "I am sometimes determined to read the Quran but when I remember what it contains, I fear [Allah's] anger, so [instead of reading the Quran] I resort to extolling Allah's perfection and seeking His forgiveness instead." (Quoted in al-Zabeedi, vol. 5, p. 116.) Similarly, ibn Baadees refers to the claim of some that for the "common folk" it is better for them to says prayers for the Prophet (peace be upon him) than to read the Quran because when they say prayers for the Prophet (peace be upon him) they will be rewarded without any sin while if a sinner reads the Quran he will be even more sinful since he is going against what he is reading. Ibn Baadees provides a lengthy refutation of this misconception. One of the most important points that he makes is that the one who is "cursed by the Quran while reading it" is not being cursed because he is reading it. However, he is being cursed by it due to his sins, and that curse is present whether the person is actually reading the Quran or not. (See ibn Baadees, pp. 35-39.) Actually, such a reader must change his intention and approach to the Quran. He should not read the Quran simply for the sake of blessings but he should read it to gain its guidance, learn it and apply it in his life. If he studies the Quran sincerely, it should affect his heart and that should lead him to discontinue his sins and offences. In fact, it is the best means to help a person change his ways and follow the Straight Path.

مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ حُمِّلُوا التَّوْرَاةَ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَحْمِلُوهَا كَمَثَلِ الْحِمَارِ يَحْمِلُ أَسْفَارًا

"The similitude of those who were entrusted with the Torah but who subsequently failed in its (obligations) is that of a donkey which carries huge tomes (of books but understands them not)" (*al-Jumuah* 5).[1]

According to Abdul Ghani, the following verses also applies to such complacent readers of the Quran,

يَاأَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لِمَ تَقُولُونَ مَا لا تَفْعَلُونَ كَبُرَ مَقْتًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَنْ تَقُولُوا مَا لاَ تَفْعَلُونَ

"O you who believe! Why do you say that which you do not do? Grievously odious is it in the sight of Allah that you say that which you do not do" (*al-Saff* 2-3). These verses were revealed blaming those Muslims who said that they wanted to perform the act most beloved to Allah and yet when the command for jihad was revealed, they found it difficult to perform that act although it was beloved to Allah. Abdul Ghani then asks what must be the situation of the person who reads the Quran and yet he is very far away from its teachings, not fulfilling its commands and remaining away

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[1] Some Muslims get very upset when verses referring to the Jews or Christians are quoted in reference to the Muslims, as if there is no way that Muslims should ever be likened to the Jews or Christians. This attitude, which could be the result of religious arrogance and which is completely unrealistic, cannot be accepted. Actually, as ibn Ashoor and al-Zamakhshari point out, many verses that are directly talking about the disbelievers are indirectly giving a lesson or a warning to the believers and that is, in reality, their purpose. Muslims today must face the reality that they may be walking in the footsteps of the disbelievers, as the Prophet (peace be upon him) stated in a hadith. Hence, one must understand these verses and their implications for the behavior of the Muslims of today. Cf., Muhammad al-Taahir ibn Ashoor, *Tafseer al-Tahreer wa al-Tanweer* (no publication information given), vol. 1, p. 37.

from what is proscribes. His is a terrible state as he claims to believe in the Quran, he reads it, he himself is stating what it is saying and yet it has no effect on him whatsoever.[1]

In fact, some Muslims today may be content with reading the Quran for years without ever taking the time to understand what they are reading to make sure that they are applying it properly. This is in stark contrast to the way of the Companions, those who followed the guidance of the Quran and who earned Allah's pleasure. Abdullah ibn Masood said, "When one among us learned ten verses, he would not go beyond them until he knew their meanings and he acted upon them." Similarly, Abu Abdul Rahmaan al-Sulami stated, "Those who used to read the Quran to us narrated to me that they would learn from the Prophet (peace be upon him) and if they would learn ten verses, they would not depart from them until they knew what they contained of deeds. Hence, we learned the Quran and the deeds together."[2] Abdullah ibn Umar ibn al-Khattaab stated, "We lived during a long period and each of us was granted faith before the [revelation of many parts of the] Quran.[3] Then when a *soorah* was revealed to Muhammad (peace be upon him), he learned its lawful and unlawful [commands] and its commands and threats and his stance toward it. Then a time came when I saw a man who was given the Quran prior to his being granted faith; he would read the entire Quran from the opening *soorah* to the end without realizing what are its commandments and threats and what should his stance be

1 Abdul Ghani, p. 73.
2 Quoted in ibn Katheer, *Tafseer al-Quran al-Adheem*, p. 14.
3 This portion of his statement has been interpreted to mean that they had the belief that the Quran is to be applied and submitted to before much of the Quran was revealed. Later peoples have the entire Quran but they are lacking in that attitude. Hence, their application of the Quran is not comparable to the application of the Companions. Cf., al-Hakami, p. 86.

towards it and he would scatter it like the scattering of one flying away."[1]

The people who read the Quran in this fashion are not fulfilling the proper requirements of reciting the Quran; hence one can doubt if they will achieve any blessings from their improper type of reading. Allah says in the Quran,

الَّذِينَ آتَيْنَاهُمْ الْكِتَابَ يَتْلُونَهُ حَقَّ تِلاوَتِهِ أُوْلَئِكَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِهِ وَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِهِ فَأُوْلَئِكَ هُمْ الْخَاسِرُونَ

"Those to whom We have given the Book recite it as it should be recited. They are the ones who believe therein. And whosoever disbelieves in it, those are they who are the losers" (*al-Baqarah* 121). Abdullah ibn Masood said about, "recite it as it should be recited,"

> By the One in whose hand is my soul, the proper reciting is to treat permissible what it states as permissible, to treat forbidden what is states as forbidden, to recite it in the way Allah revealed it, not to distort any word from its proper meaning, and not to interpret it in a way that it is not to be interpreted.[2]

Furthermore, in many of the hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him) in which he described what accrues to one who reads the Quran, he stated the conditional factor that one reads it and also acts upon it. For example, the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said, in a hadith mentioned earlier wherein the *soorah*s will be pleading on behalf of the people,

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[1]Recorded by al-Baihaqi and al-Haakim.
[2] Quoted in ibn Katheer, *Tafseer al-Quran al-Adheem*, p. 114.

يُؤْتَى بِالْقُرْآنِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَأَهْلِهِ الَّذِينَ كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ بِهِ تَقْدُمُهُ سُورَةُ الْبَقَرَةِ وَآلُ عِمْرَانَ

"The Quran will be brought on the Day of Resurrection along with its people who used to act according to it with *soorah*s *al-Baqarah* and *ali-Imraan* preceding them…"

In another hadith, the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said,

الْمُؤْمِنُ الَّذِي يَقْرَأُ الْقُرْآنَ وَيَعْمَلُ بِهِ كَالأُتْرُجَّةِ طَعْمُهَا طَيِّبٌ وَرِيحُهَا طَيِّبٌ وَالْمُؤْمِنُ الَّذِي لا يَقْرَأُ الْقُرْآنَ وَيَعْمَلُ بِهِ كَالتَّمْرَةِ طَعْمُهَا طَيِّبٌ وَلا رِيحَ لَهَا

"The example of the believer who recites the Quran and acts upon it is like that of a citron which tastes good and smells good. And he who does not recite the Quran but acts upon it is like a date which is good in taste but has no smell."[1]

The essential factor that the Prophet (peace be upon him) mentioned in both of these examples is that the person acts upon the Quran. The real blessings and virtues are found in the one who acts upon the Quran and not the one who simply reads it without following up that reading by enacting what he has read.

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1 Recorded by al-Bukhari.

Using the Quran Only as a Source of Healing or a Cure for Physical Ailments

There are a number of verses in the Quran that are used as evidence that the Quran can be used as a healing for physical illnesses. Among these verses are:

وَنُنَزِّلُ مِنْ الْقُرْآنِ مَا هُوَ شِفَاءٌ وَرَحْمَةٌ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَلَا يَزِيدُ الظَّالِمِينَ إِلاَّ خَسَارًا

"We sent down (stage by stage) of the Quran that which is a healing and a mercy to those who believe. To the unjust it causes nothing but loss after loss" (*al-Israa* 82).

قُلْ هُوَ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا هُدًى وَشِفَاءٌ

"Say: It is a guide and a healing for those who believe" (*Fussilat* 44). There is some discussion about whether these verses could possibly refer to physical diseases or only spiritual illnesses.[1]

In any case the following hadith is clear that the Quran is a type of cure for physical as well as spiritual ailments: Abu Saeed al-Khudri narrated that some of the Companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) were among an Arab tribe that refused to be hospitable toward them. While they were among that tribe, the chief of the tribe was bit by a snake (or stung by a scorpion) and they asked the Companions, "Have you got any medicine with you or anybody who can make an incantation?" They answered, "You refused to be hospitable toward us so we will not treat

[1]For such a discussion see Muhammad Ibrahim Saleem, *Al-Tadaawi bil-Quran wa al-Istishfaa bil-Ruqa wa al-Taaweedh* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Quran, n.d.), pp. 72-82. On pp. 137-144 he discusses the experiments with the Quran as a source of healing that were performed in Panama City, Florida.

him unless you pay us for it." So they agreed to pay them a flock of sheep. One of the Prophet's Companions started reciting *soorah al-Faatiha* and gathering his saliva and spitting it into (the place of the bite). The chief got cured and his people presented the sheep to the Companions but they said (to themselves), "We will not take it unless we ask the Prophet (peace be upon him) (if it is lawful for us)." When they asked him, he smiled and said,

وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ أَنَّهَا رُقْيَةٌ خُذُوهَا وَاضْرِبُوا لِي بِسَهْمٍ

"How did you know that *soorah al-Faatihah* is an incantation? Take it (the flock of sheep) and assign me a share."[1]

But obviously if this is the only way that a person uses the Quran or turns to it, then he will be missing the greater purpose of the Quran. He will be using it for something for which it may be used, healing physical illnesses, but he will not be using it for something which is much more vital to his welfare, healing of spiritual illnesses. Allah says,

يَاأَيُّهَا النَّاسُ قَدْ جَاءَتْكُمْ مَوْعِظَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ وَشِفَاءٌ لِمَا فِي الصُّدُورِ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةٌ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ

"O mankind! There has come to you an admonition from your Lord and a healing for the (diseases) in your hearts, and for those who believe, a Guidance and a Mercy" (*Yoonus* 57). Commenting on this verse, ibn Baadees wrote,

> The verse in *soorah Yoonus* specifies its healing as being for what is in the hearts, which is where the beliefs reside. This is because that is the main goal of the Quran and it is the foundation for

[1]Recorded by al-Bukhari.

> other aspects. This is because if the hearts are healed of evil beliefs and the doubts are extracted from it and the truth is believed in and held with certainty, the souls are then purified and the behavior of the human, both as an individual and his society, will be set aright and they will be ascending the steps of completeness.
>
> This fact is not negated by the Quran also being a cure for evil character, as its being mentioned in a general sense in the verses [quoted above] from *soorah al-Israa* and *soorah al-Sajdah* would indicate. This is because character originates with beliefs and is a necessary consequence thereof. Furthermore, the soul of humans is not perfected until the both of them are healed. This also does not negate the fact that the Quran, on some occasions, may be a healing for physical ailments, as the [unrestricted mention of] healing would also imply... However, that is not the main purpose of what is meant by the healing of the Quran.[1]

Ibn Baadees goes on to explain that illnesses are either spiritual or physical. The spiritual diseases are those of the mind and of the soul. The diseases related to the mind include apathy, misconceptions, blind following of cultures and forefathers' ways, false beliefs and doubts about the truth. The diseases related to the soul include bad character, lusts and evil desires.

The Quran presents a cure for both of these types of spiritual diseases. With respect to the first type, the Quran invites and requests mankind to think, ponder, understand and investigate themselves and the creation around them. The Quran shows mankind how to perceive the reality of this creation and how to think. It blames those who blindly follow

1 Ibn Baadees, p. 143.

the teachings of their forefathers even when their forefathers were in errant. Then the Quran presents convincing and unquestionable arguments concerning the reality of this world. The end result for those who wish to be cured of such illnesses will be a strong belief in the truth with no doubt or confusion.

As for the second type of spiritual diseases, the diseases of the soul, the Quran reminds and presents to the person the evil results of such diseases. As the same time, it guides one to the proper behavior and character, showing that they are of great benefit and importance.

This is how the spiritual diseases are cured. They both go back, though, to curing the beliefs, which is the foundation for the other realms. In fact, the only real cure for such diseases can be found in the Quran. If one looks for their cures in any other sources, then the disease will only increase.[1] Such in fact is the case nowadays as people turn to man-made theories and ideologies to find cures for problems and diseases for which only the Creator can offer a true and complete cure.

Studying the Quran to Recognize its "Scientific Miracles"

The "scientific miracles" of the Quran is a topic that has taken the attention of many people recently, especially since the turn of this Hijri century.[2] There is no question that

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[1] Cf., ibn Baadees, pp. 143-4. Also see Abdullah al-Noori, *Al-Urwah al-Wuthqa* (Beirut: Daar al-Arabiyyah, n.d.), pp. 43-46.

[2] It was during the turn of this Hijri Century that many Muslim writers, noting how far the Muslim world had fallen behind the West in the physical sciences, tried to prove that the physical sciences of the West were completely compatible with the Quran. This, though, was not the first time that one finds such writings in Quranic commentaries, where one tries to

the Quran itself is a miracle. The "scientific miracles" of the Quran can rightly be considered one aspect of its miraculous nature. This miraculous aspect has even led some people to have a stronger conviction concerning the truth of the Quran. This has even been referred to as a tool in calling non-Muslims to Islam.

It is true that the noted Quranic commentator ibn Ashoor considers the representation of the miraculous nature of the Quran which demonstrates the truthfulness of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) as one of the main goals of the Quran. Allah challenges mankind to produce something similar to the Quran. Hence, it is part of the role of the Quranic commentator to highlight its miraculous nature. But even he notes that the "scientific explanations" must be kept to a minimum and cannot become the overriding purpose of the study of the Quran.[1] That is the same point that is being emphasized here.[2]

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apply "science" to the interpretation of the Quran. Abu Haamid al-Ghazaali is considered one of the first to use science to interpret the Quran. Al-Roomi, though, noticed a big difference between the approach of the earlier scholars and the approach of many of the modern writers. The earlier scholars, in general, would take the Quran as the foundation and would mention what supported it of scientific theories of their time. On the other hand, many of the modern day writers took science as the foundation and tried to interpret the Quran in ways that would support these scientific theories although, in reality, the verses did not point to them at all. See Fahd al-Roomi, *Itijaahaat al-Tafseer fi al-Qarn al-Raabi Ashar* (published by its author, 1986), vol. 2, p. 563. Although it is beyond the scope of this work, in the same book, al-Roomi (vol. 2, pp. 550-604) reviews the statements of classical and modern scholars on the acceptability of using science to explain the verses of the Quran.

1 Ibn Ashoor, vol. 1, pp. 41-43.

2 Actually, there are a number of pitfalls that many of those who stress the scientific miracles of the Quran fall into. First, many times they represent scientific theory as scientific fact and then force the Quran to comply with that theory. If that theory is later proven to be false, it would either mean that the meaning of the Quran is false or its meaning must now somehow change. Second, many times they force interpretations upon the Quranic verse that are simply not acceptable in view of the context of the verse or the language of the Quran. For example, concerning the verse, "It is He

Recognizing the scientific miracles and delving into them in detail should not be one's main purpose in studying the Quran. Indeed, recognizing the scientific miracles of the Quran is not necessary for attaining the proper guidance of the Quran. This is why the Companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him), who were known for implementing the Quran in the proper way, did not give much consideration to this miraculous aspect of the Quran yet, at the same time, they understood the Quran and knew how it is to be applied.

Beyond that, there can be a danger in emphasizing such scientific miracles for the reader who is preoccupied with noticing those aspects. This is because he may be missing the true message of the verse that he is reading. He may become involved in some details that are not necessary for his guidance while missing the bigger picture of what the verse is describing.

Note the following verses as an example,

أَلَمْ تَرَى إِلَى رَبِّكَ كَيْفَ مَدَّ الظِّلَّ وَلَوْ شَاءَ لَجَعَلَهُ سَاكِنًا

ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَا الشَّمْسَ عَلَيْهِ دَلِيلاً ثُمَّ قَبَضْنَاهُ إِلَيْنَا قَبْضًا يَسِيرًا

"Have you not seen how your Lord spread the shadow? If He willed, He could have made it still. But We have made the sun its guide. Then We withdraw it to Us, a gradual

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who created you from a single person (*nafs*) and then He has created from him his spouse" (*al-Araaf* 189), Abdul Razaaq Naufal explained the *nafs* and its spouse (*zauj*) as being the electron and the neutron. He says that over 1400 years ago, the Quran pointed to the existence of the electron and the neutron and its role in creation, and he quoted this verse. His argument can be refuted on a number of points. However, a cursory look at the remainder of the verse should be sufficient to demonstrate that his interpretation is completely unacceptable. The verse states, "It is He who created you from a single person (*nafs*) and then He has created from him his spouse *in order that he might enjoy the pleasure of living with her*" (*al-Araaf* 189). Obviously, the remainder of the verse proves that it could not possibly be in reference to the electron and neutron. Cf., al-Roomi, *Itijaahaat*, vol. 2, pp. 633-634.

concealed withdrawal" (*al-Furqaan* 45-46). At this point, one could begin to scrutinize the words of this verse and attempt to relate them to some scientific theories as to the nature of shadows and their relationship with the sun and so forth. However, Muhammad Qutb has a revealing discussion of what the main purpose of verses of this nature seem to be.

Qutb writes that there is nothing necessarily new or fascinating with respect to scientific knowledge in the words of this verse. However, after reading this verse, one's perspective on the shadows that he sees should change. Everyday a person witnesses shadows and how they become larger or smaller throughout the day. Usually, not much thought is given to the shadows and one is only really concerned with them when he needs a place to cool off on a hot day. But the two verses above should put everything in a different perspective.

These verses make it clear that the shadows are not moving on their own. Similarly, it is not simply what they call nowadays, "the laws of nature." Instead, it is Allah who is moving them everyday, as the verse says, "Have you not seen *how your Lord* spread the shadow?" Allah is making them move and change on a daily basis and if He will, He could bring an end to all of that motion and change. If Allah willed to do that, there would be no power or force who could ever bring them back to the way they were.

What happens to many humans, including believers, is that they become complacent with respect to these signs of Allah around them. They begin to think about them as "the laws of nature" that Allah has made for this creation. They therefore begin to lose sight of what is really occurring—that these verses clearly bring to light. Even though these signs are all around them, their hearts still can become dead because they are not perceiving these signs in the right manner.

The fact is that it is not simply a matter of Allah creating these "laws" that are at work around the humans.

The Quran presents the matter in an even more moving fashion: it is Allah who is moving them and controlling all the affairs. Hence, the person should be taken from seeing these signs around him to remembering Allah whose acts of creation and wisdom are present around him at all times. When he sees these signs, he is reminded of Allah. And since these signs are always around him, day in and day out, they always serve as a reminder to him of his Creator and Lord.[1]

In addition to the feeling of "Allah's presence and working" in the nature around oneself, one also develops a feeling for Allah's greatness and Allah's supreme knowledge. The One who created all that this earth contains and has made this earth to operate in the excellent fashion that it does must be greater and wiser than any imagination could grasp. This feeling also leads to another very important feeling: Allah who created all of this could not or would not create it without a purpose and a reason. At that point, one begins to feel his purpose in this creation and his responsibility to his Lord. This process of witnessing nature and realizing Allah's greatness and wisdom with its obvious and necessary conclusion is captured in the following verses of the Quran,

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلاَفِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ
لَآيَاتٍ لِأُولِي الأَلْبَابِ الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا
وَعَلَى جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالأَرْضِ
رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هَذَا بَاطِلاً سُبْحَانَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ رَبَّنَا
إِنَّكَ مَنْ تُدْخِلِ النَّارَ فَقَدْ أَخْزَيْتَهُ وَمَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِنْ أَنْصَارٍ

[1] Cf., Muhammad Qutb, *Diraasaat Quraaniyyah* (Beirut: Daar al-Shurooq, 1982), pp. 41-43.

رَبَّنَا إِنَّنَا سَمِعْنَا مُنَادِيًا يُنَادِي لِلإِيمَانِ أَنْ آمِنُوا بِرَبِّكُمْ فَآمَنَّا
رَبَّنَا فَاغْفِرْ لَنَا ذُنُوبَنَا وَكَفِّرْ عَنَّا سَيِّئَاتِنَا وَتَوَفَّنَا مَعَ الأَبْرَارِ
رَبَّنَا وَآتِنَا مَا وَعَدْتَنَا عَلَى رُسُلِكَ وَلاَ تُخْزِنَا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ
إِنَّكَ لا تُخْلِفُ الْمِيعَادَ

"Behold! In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day, there are indeed Signs for men of understanding. Those who remember Allah, standing, sitting, and lying down on their sides, and contemplate the (wonders of) creation in the heavens and the earth, (with the thought): 'Our Lord! You have not created all this without a purpose. How perfect You are! Give us salvation from the Penalty of the Fire. Our Lord! Any whom You do admit to the Fire, truly You cover [him] with shame, and never will wrong-doers find any helpers! Our Lord! we have heard the call of one calling (us) to Faith, 'Believe in the Lord,' and we have believed. Our Lord! Forgive us our sins, blot out from us our iniquities, and take to Yourself our souls in the company of the righteous. Our Lord! Grant us what You did promise to us through Your Messengers, and save us from shame on the Day of Judgment; for You never break Your promise" (*ali-Imraan* 190-194).

The above verses are just one example. There are numerous verses of this nature that turn the reader's attention to the obvious and clear yet truly amazing aspects of the workings of this world. They remind the person of the reality of the Creator and the human's real place in this creation. They remind the alert reader with a lesson that follows him throughout his life: This world is not made up of a set of scientific laws that were the result of nothing or chance explosions of energy, with no purpose or goal to them. Instead, it is the working of a willing Lord who created

mankind for a very important purpose; furthermore, if He willed He could bring an end to all of man's efforts that are based on the laws of this creation. One should then be very thankful to Allah whenever Allah blesses him through the workings of this universe and He does not, instead, turn man's efforts into vain ones. One should never become arrogant as one should realize that all of his efforts would be for naught if Allah did not allow them to be successful.

This aspect is very clear in *soorah al-Waqiah*, wherein one finds the following verses,

أَفَرَأَيْتُم مَا تُمْنُونَ أَأَنْتُم تَخْلُقُونَهُ أَمْ نَحْنُ الْخَالِقُونَ نَحْنُ قَدَّرْنَا بَيْنَكُمُ الْمَوْتَ وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمَسْبُوقِينَ عَلَى أَنْ نُبَدِّلَ أَمْثَالَكُمْ وَنُنْشِئَكُمْ فِي مَا لا تَعْلَمُونَ وَلَقَدْ عَلِمْتُمُ النَّشْأَةَ الأُولَى فَلَوْلا تَذَكَّرُونَ أَفَرَأَيْتُم مَا تَحْرُثُونَ أَأَنْتُم تَزْرَعُونَهُ أَمْ نَحْنُ الزَّارِعُونَ لَوْ نَشَاءُ لَجَعَلْنَاهُ حُطَامًا فَظَلَلْتُمْ تَفَكَّهُونَ إِنَّا لَمُغْرَمُونَ بَلْ نَحْنُ مَحْرُومُونَ أَفَرَأَيْتُمُ الْمَاءَ الَّذِي تَشْرَبُونَ أَأَنْتُمْ أَنزَلْتُمُوهُ مِنَ الْمُزْنِ أَمْ نَحْنُ الْمُنزِلُونَ لَوْ نَشَاءُ جَعَلْنَاهُ أُجَاجًا فَلَوْلا تَشْكُرُونَ أَفَرَأَيْتُمُ النَّارَ الَّتِي تُورُونَ أَأَنْتُمْ أَنشَأْتُمْ شَجَرَتَهَا أَمْ نَحْنُ الْمُنشِئُونَ نَحْنُ جَعَلْنَاهَا تَذْكِرَةً وَمَتَاعًا لِلْمُقْوِينَ فَسَبِّحْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الْعَظِيمِ

"Do you then see the (human seed) that you emit, is it you who create it or are We the Creators? We have decreed death to be your common lot, and We are not to be frustrated from changing your forms and creating you (again) in (forms) that

you know not. And you certainly already know the first form of creation. Why then do you not celebrate His praises? Then tell Me about the seed you sow in the ground. Is it you that makes it grow or are We the Grower? Were it Our will, we could crumble it to dry pieces, and you would be regretful. [Saying,] 'We are indeed ruined. Nay, but we are deprived.' Then tell Me about the water you drink. Is it you who causes it to come down from the rain clouds or are We the Ones who cause it to come down? If We willed, We verily could make it salt [and undrinkable]. Why then do you not give thanks [to Allah]? Then tell Me about the fire which you kindle. Is it you who made the tree thereof to grow, or are We the grower? We have made it a reminder and an article of use for the travelers. Then glorify with praises the name of your Lord, the Most Great" (*al-Waaqiah* 58-74).

Although these verses may not add much to one's body of knowledge concerning nature, they bring about a new perspective on nature, a perspective that reminds one of Allah in the surrounding nature and of His greatness and supreme knowledge. This understanding of these types of verses can have a great long-run effect on the believer. It will increase his faith and bring him closer to Allah as he is constantly reminded of Allah as he witnesses the nature around him.

The important point once again is if someone spends most of his time studying the Quran in trying to discover its scientific miracles in detail and not noticing the greater picture and guidance that the Quran is offering, he would have missed the essential teachings and purpose of the Quran. The Quran will not have that kind of effect on him that it did have, for example, upon the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) who were not aware of many of the "scientific miracles" recently discovered but who understood what these verses concerning nature and science implied for their lives.

Studying the Quran as a Source of Culture and Knowledge

The Quran contains a great deal of information about the prophets who appeared before the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon them) as well as the different peoples who were destroyed because of their refusal to obey Allah's laws. If someone wanted to learn about such people as a matter of culture and learning, one can find this needed information in the Quran. Obviously, the historical information stated in the Quran is not meant to teach the Muslims history but is meant for much more than that, as shall be noted below. As Murad advised,

> Do not read it merely for intellectual pursuit and pleasure; even though you must apply your intellect to the full to the task of understanding the Quran. So many people spend a lifetime in studying the language, style, history, geography, law and ethics of the Quran, and yet their lives remain untouched by its message. The Quran frequently refers to people who have knowledge but do not derive benefit from it.[1]

In fact, in the history of Islam, many people got distracted by delving into this aspect of the Quran in great detail. They attempted to discover all of the details that they could about the people that Allah talks about in the Quran. That is why one can find in some of the books of Quranic commentary discussions of the following issues: the type of tree from which Adam ate, the type of wood Noah used to build his ark, the names and types of birds that Abraham killed and were brought back to life, the names of the Companions of the Cave as well as the name of their dog, the

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1 Khurram Murad, *Way to the Quran* (Leicester, UK: The Islamic Foundation, 1985), p. 28.

price for which Joseph was sold, the name of the ruler who debated with Abraham and numerous other details that Allah has left unmentioned in the Quran.[1]

None of that type of information was necessary as everything that the Muslims need for guidance is contained in the Quran. Unfortunately, many did not grasp this point and turned to unauthentic sources to discover the history of the prophets and people mentioned in the Quran. Regrettably, much of the unauthentic information they uncovered found its way into many of the commentaries on the Quran.

Included in this category of people could be those who read the Quran simply for its linguistic and artistic beauty. They turn to the Quran to read pure and beautiful Arabic and to study the prose of the Arabic language. Or, perhaps, they study the Quran as a type of art. Their Quranic study does not go beyond that; therefore, they miss the true purpose of the Quran.

The Benefit and Purpose of the Stories in the Quran

The above is not meant to downplay the importance and benefit of the stories that one finds in the Quran. It is important to read and study those stories. These stories contain very important lessons and admonitions. After one of the longest stories in the Quran, the story of Joseph (*Yoosuf*) and his brothers, Allah makes a very important statement about the stories when He says,

لَقَدْ كَانَ فِي قَصَصِهِمْ عِبْرَةٌ لِأُولِي الأَلْبَاب

"Indeed, in their stories there is a lesson for men of understanding" (*Yoosuf* 111).

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[1] Cf., ibn Katheer, *Tafseer al-Quran al-Adheem*, p. 14.

The essential aspect is not searching for the missing facts that are not mentioned in the Quran—what the Quran contains is sufficient. The essential aspect is to study what the Quran states and to understand what the lessons and messages of those stories are. When a person does this, he will believe in what those stories state as the reality of what occurred and he will know that part of human's history. Beyond that, though, he will understand the message and guidance for him in his life today.

Many scholars have discussed numerous benefits of the Quranic stories. Below are some of the points that they have made.[1] When realizing these benefits from the stories, one may have a clearer understanding of why Allah has mentioned these stories and what the believer should get out of those stories. One may also realize for himself how he may have been emphasizing some aspects of those stories while not noticing their more important characteristics, lessons and benefits. When reading these stories again in the future, he may read them in a new light that gives him a fresh meaning and a stronger purpose to them.

One of the most important benefits from these stories is that they demonstrate the manner in which one should call people to Allah and what are the matters to be emphasized first. These stories make it clear that all of the prophets' primary message was one and the same: calling the people to the true enactment of *tauheed* or the oneness of Allah. Allah makes this point clear when He says,

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ مِنْ رَسُولٍ إِلاَّ نُوحِي إِلَيْهِ أَنَّهُ لا إِلَهَ إِلاَّ أَنَا فَاعْبُدُونِ

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[1] Cf., Jaarullah al-Khateeb, *Qasas al-Quraan* (Riyadh: Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University, 1393 A.H.), pp. 42-48; Ahmad Fareed, *Taiseer al-Manaan fi Qasas al-Quraan* (al-Damam, Saudi Arabia: Daar ibn al-Jauzi, 1990), pp. 13-19.

"We did not send any messenger before you (Muhammad) but We inspired him that: there is none worthy of worship except Me, so worship Me alone" (*al-Anbiyaa* 25).

In addition, these stories show that the true religion of mankind has always been one and the same, that religion that is consistent with man's natural inclination. It is the religion of *tauheed*. There has been no evolution in the true religion; man was not first a polytheist and then as his thought developed he became a monotheist. The first humans were monotheists and there has never been nor will there ever be any other proper way of life for humans.

Furthermore, through these stories, the believer realizes that he is part of one great community that has existed throughout the centuries. Allah says while referring to all of the prophets and their followers,

إِنَّ هَذِهِ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَاعْبُدُونِ

"Truly, this, your community [or religion] is one community and I am your Lord. Therefore, worship Me alone" (*al-Anbiyaa* 92). This community has as its sole purpose the worship and pleasure of Allah. The Muslim is not alone in his striving to follow the straight path. Many have gone along that path in the past; they have been successful in adhering to that path and he can also be successful in adhering to that path.

Second, these stories act as a confirmation of the truthfulness of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and should strengthen a person's belief in the Prophet (peace be upon him). The Prophet (peace be upon him) was unlettered and he was not a person who read or studied the stories of the earlier prophets. It is inconceivable that someone of his nature would know the details and significant aspects of the peoples of the past, in particular details concerning many prophets who were not well known among the polytheistic Arabs in Makkah. In fact, after mentioning

the story of Noah, Allah says to the Prophet (peace be upon him),

تِلْكَ مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ الْغَيْبِ نُوحِيهَا إِلَيْكَ مَا كُنتَ تَعْلَمُهَا أَنْتَ وَلا قَوْمُكَ مِنْ قَبْلِ هَذَا

"Such are some of the stories of the Unseen which We have revealed to you: before this neither you nor your people knew them" (*Hood* 49).

Related to this feature, these verses also brought to light many facts that were known to many of the Jewish and Christian scholars but which they concealed from their people. In addition, these stories presented strong evidence proving that the Jews and Christians had distorted their original messages and how they made claims for themselves that were not true. For example, the stories found in the Quran concerning Abraham dispel many of the Jewish, Christian and polytheistic Arab claims about him. The Quran shows that Abraham was on the path of monotheism and not along the path of Judaism, Christianity or polytheism. Hence, those who have the most right to claim him as a patriarch are those who follow his true teachings. Allah says,

مَا كَانَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ يَهُودِيًا وَلا نَصْرَانِيًا وَلَكِنْ كَانَ حَنِيفًا مُسْلِمًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنْ الْمُشْرِكِينَ إِنَّ أَوْلَى النَّاسِ بِإِبْرَاهِيمَ لَلَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوهُ وَهَذَا النَّبِيُّ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَاللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

"Abraham was not a Jew nor a Christian; but he was true in Faith, and bowed his will to Allah's (which is Islam), and he was not from the polytheists. Without doubt, among men, the nearest to Abraham are those who follow him, as are also this

Prophet and those who believe: and Allah is the Protector of the believers" (*ali-Imraan* 67-68).

Third, the stories provide reassurance to the heart of the Messenger (peace be upon him) and, in fact, after him, everyone who follows in his footsteps. Many of these stories show how the earlier prophets were treated by their people. They show that all of the prophets had to face hardships and difficulties, including ridicule, scorn and denial from their own people. Therefore, the Prophet (peace be upon him) and those who follow in his path should realize that when they face such difficulties in their lives, earlier prophets also had to face the same. This is a "law" and trial from Allah that all may have to face. At the same time, though, their stories make it clear that Allah gave them strength and supported them due to their patience.

Concerning these points, Allah revealed in the Quran,

وَكُلاًّ نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ الرُّسُلِ مَا نُثَبِّتُ بِهِ فُؤَادَكَ
وَجَاءَكَ فِي هَذِهِ الْحَقُّ وَمَوْعِظَةٌ وَذِكْرَى لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ

"All that We relate to you of the stories of the Messengers, with it We make your heart firm and in them there comes to you the Truth, as well as an exhortation and a message of remembrance to those who believe" (*Hood* 120).

Allah also says,

وَلَقَدْ كُذِّبَتْ رُسُلٌ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ فَصَبَرُوا عَلَى مَا كُذِّبُوا
وَأُوذُوا حَتَّى أَتَاهُمْ نَصْرُنَا وَلَا مُبَدِّلَ لِكَلِمَاتِ اللَّهِ وَلَقَدْ
جَاءَكَ مِنْ نَبَإِ الْمُرْسَلِينَ

"Rejected were the Messengers before you. With patience and constancy they bore their rejection and their wrongs, until Our aid did reach them. There is none who can alter the

Words (and Decrees) of Allah. Already have you received some account of those Messengers" (*al-Anaam* 34).

Fourth, these stories demonstrate how greatly Allah blesses His true and devoted servants. Even a cursory reading of the stories of Solomon, David, Mary, Jesus, Zechariah, Abraham and others (peace and blessings of Allah be upon all of them) will allow the reader to recognize how much Allah blessed, guided and aided these pious people. This will remind the reader that if he is working for the sake of Allah, Allah will indeed help him, bless him and never allow his works go for no avail. This is part of the fulfillment of Allah's promise in the Quran,

يَاأَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنْ تَنصُرُوا اللَّهَ يَنصُرْكُمْ وَيُثَبِّتْ أَقْدَامَكُمْ

"O you who believe! If you will aid (the cause of) Allah, He will aid you, and plant your feet firmly" (*Muhammad* 7).

Fifth, Allah has power over all things and can do whatever He wills. In the stories of the earlier prophets, for example, one can read about how Allah is able to manifest His power over this creation. Nothing occurs except by His will. If He wills to change the "natural course of events" and allow "miracles" to occur, that is easy for Him and He has done that throughout the history of mankind. Such can be seen in the stories of Moses, Jesus, Abraham and others (peace and blessing of Allah be upon all of them).

Sixth, by virtue of the fact that the different prophets were sent to people with varying ills and outlooks, their stories present comprehensive guidelines showing how to deal with different societal ills that reoccur throughout the history of mankind. For example, the story of Lot deals with widespread sexual deviance in society; Shuaib's people were wont to commit evil business practices and so on.

Finally, the stories of the prophets give the believers more details about their lives, their teachings and their sacrifices for the sake of Allah. This should develop greater love for them in the hearts of the believer, which is in reality an increase in one's faith. If this love for them is true and strong, the believer may be united with these wonderful prophets in the Hereafter, as the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said,

الْمَرْءُ مَعَ مَنْ أَحَبَّ

"The person will be with whom he loves."[1]

The Story of Moses (peace be upon him) and the Pharaoh

One of the stories that is repeated often in the Quran is the story of Moses (peace be upon him) and his encounter with the Pharaoh.[2] Many lessons can be derived from these

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[1] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.

[2] Many of the stories found in the Quran are repeated throughout the Quran. The purpose for this repetition is many-fold, including: First, the different ways of presenting the same story demonstrates the linguistic eloquence of the Quran. Presenting similar teachings in very different ways leaves the matter fresh in the reader's mind and he anxiously rereads the story and continues to benefit from it. Second, repeating the same essential material in different forms is part of the miraculous nature of the Quran. It is part of the linguistic feat of the Quran that the Arabs could not match. Third, presenting the same stories more than once demonstrates to the reader the great significance of those particular stories. The reader will take those events more seriously and ponder over them in greater detail. Finally, by presenting such stories in various ways, Allah highlights different aspects of the same stories in order to impress upon the reader different lessons and morals that result from the same incident. Cf., Mannaa al-Qattaan, *Mabaahith fi Uloom al-Quran* (Beirut: Musassat al-Risaalah, 1983), p. 308.

stories. Here only some important aspects will be highlighted.[1]

One can see in the life of Moses (peace be upon him) that when Allah wills to preserve and protect something, none of the machinations of mankind can foil His plan. Such was the case with Moses (peace be upon him) when his mother cast him into the river to protect him from Pharaoh's troops who were killing the sons of the Tribes of Israel. Allah revealed to Moses' mother the words of truth,

وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَى أُمِّ مُوسَى أَنْ أَرْضِعِيهِ فَإِذَا خِفْتِ عَلَيْهِ فَأَلْقِيهِ فِي الْيَمِّ وَلَا تَخَافِي وَلَا تَحْزَنِي إِنَّا رَادُّوهُ إِلَيْكِ وَجَاعِلُوهُ مِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ

"And We inspired the mother of Moses, 'Suckle him but when you fear for him, cast him into the river and fear not nor grieve. Verily, We shall bring him back to you and shall make him one of Our messengers'" (*al-Qasas* 7). Such is the perfect will, planning and knowledge of Allah.

Second, one can see in the story of Moses (peace be upon him) that no matter how strong the forces of evil might seem— like what they call the "superpowers" today— there will come a time when they will be brought down and removed. Pharaoh and his forces were destroyed swiftly. In fact, nothing remained of their greatness— but the lesson that their evil plight gives to those who reflect and understand truly remains. Allah says,

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1 Cf., al-Raawi, pp. 230-232. The valuable lessons of the story of Moses and the Pharaoh are discussed in great detail in a number of works. In addition to the commentaries on the relevant verses of the Quran, the interested reader may consult Fareed, pp. 104-163; Abbul Kareem Zaidaan, *al-Mustafaad min Qasas al-Quran li-l-Dawah wa al-Duaah* (Beirut: Muassasah al-Risaalah, 1997), vol. 1, pp. 319-382; Muhammad al-Sayyid al-Wukail, *Nadharaat fi Ahsan al-Qasas* (Beirut: al-Daar al-Shaamiyyah, 1994), vol. 2, pp. 5-158.

فَاسْتَخَفَّ قَوْمَهُ فَأَطَاعُوهُ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا قَوْمًا فَاسِقِينَ فَلَمَّا آسَفُونَا انتَقَمْنَا مِنْهُمْ فَأَغْرَقْنَاهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ فَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ سَلَفًا وَمَثَلًا لِلْآخِرِينَ

"Thus he [the Pharaoh] befooled (and misled) his people and they obeyed him. Verily, they were ever an evildoing people. So when they angered Us, We punished them and drowned them all. We made them a precedent and an example for later generations" (*al-Zukhruf* 54-56). This is one of the clear lessons of this story. However, unfortunately, although that message is abundantly clear, most people, even those who read about this incident, do not take heed of its real lesson. Allah says,

فَالْيَوْمَ نُنَجِّيكَ بِبَدَنِكَ لِتَكُونَ لِمَنْ خَلْفَكَ آيَةً وَإِنَّ كَثِيرًا مِنَ النَّاسِ عَنْ آيَاتِنَا لَغَافِلُونَ

"So this day We shall deliver your (dead) body [that is, the body of the Pharaoh out from the sea] that you may be a sign for those who come after you. And, verily, many among mankind are heedless of Our signs" (*Yoonus* 92).

One can also see in the story of Moses (peace be upon him) and the Pharaoh the effect of faith when it implants itself in the heart. The magicians whom the Pharaoh had called together were willing to submit to his orders for some worldly benefit. However, as soon as they realized the truth of Moses' call, they immediately gave up what they would have gained and stood for the truth right in front of the "mighty" Pharaoh, prostrating to Allah. Allah describes this incident in the following verses,

فَأُلْقِيَ السَّحَرَةُ سُجَّدًا قَالُوا آمَنَّا بِرَبِّ هَارُونَ وَمُوسَى قَالَ
آمَنْتُمْ لَهُ قَبْلَ أَنْ آذَنَ لَكُمْ إِنَّهُ لَكَبِيرُكُمُ الَّذِي عَلَّمَكُمُ
السِّحْرَ فَلَأُقَطِّعَنَّ أَيْدِيَكُمْ وَأَرْجُلَكُمْ مِنْ خِلَافٍ وَلَأُصَلِّبَنَّكُمْ
فِي جُذُوعِ النَّخْلِ وَلَتَعْلَمُنَّ أَيُّنَا أَشَدُّ عَذَابًا وَأَبْقَى قَالُوا لَنْ
نُؤْثِرَكَ عَلَى مَا جَاءَنَا مِنَ الْبَيِّنَاتِ وَالَّذِي فَطَرَنَا فَاقْضِ مَا
أَنْتَ قَاضٍ إِنَّمَا تَقْضِي هَذِهِ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا إِنَّا آمَنَّا بِرَبِّنَا
لِيَغْفِرَ لَنَا خَطَايَانَا وَمَا أَكْرَهْتَنَا عَلَيْهِ مِنَ السِّحْرِ وَاللَّهُ خَيْرٌ
وَأَبْقَى إِنَّهُ مَنْ يَأْتِ رَبَّهُ مُجْرِمًا فَإِنَّ لَهُ جَهَنَّمَ لَا يَمُوتُ فِيهَا
وَلَا يَحْيَا وَمَنْ يَأْتِهِ مُؤْمِنًا قَدْ عَمِلَ الصَّالِحَاتِ فَأُولَئِكَ لَهُمُ
الدَّرَجَاتُ الْعُلَا

"So the magicians were thrown down to prostration. They said, 'We believe in the Lord of Aaron and Moses.' (Pharaoh) said, 'Do you believe in him before I give you permission? Surely this must be your leader who has taught you magic. I will certainly cut off your hands and feet on opposite sides, and I will have you crucified on trunks of palm-trees. Then you shall know for certain which of us can give the more severe and the more lasting punishment!' They said, 'Never shall we regard you as more worthy than the clear signs that have come to us or than Him Who created us! So decree whatever you desire to decree, for you can only decree (matters related to) the life of this world. For us, we have believed in our Lord, may He forgive us our faults and the magic to which you did compel us. Allah is Best and

Most Abiding.' Verily he who comes to his Lord as a sinner (at judgment), for him is Hell. Therein he shall neither die nor live. But such as come to Him as Believers who have worked righteous deeds, for them are ranks exalted" (*Taha* 70-75).

Allah has presented their story in this book that shall be read until the Day of Judgment. As ibn Abbaas said about them, in the morning, they were magicians and by the evening they were pious martyrs.[1] Their adherence to the truth is a lesson for all who come afterwards. Once a person witnesses and recognizes the truth, he should never be willing to compromise or sacrifice that truth for anything of this world. If he does, he will meet an evil end in both this life and the Hereafter. If he remains faithful to the truth and patient, he can look forward to Allah's pleasure and a great reward in the Hereafter.

The story of Moses (peace be upon him) and the Pharaoh also demonstrates that those who willingly support the tyrant ruler or who support wrong in general will be included in the punishment. Allah clearly states that it was not simply the Pharaoh who was destroyed but it was the Pharaoh and his wrongful troops who were destroyed. Allah says,

فَأَخَذْنَاهُ وَجُنُودَهُ فَنَبَذْنَاهُمْ فِي الْيَمِّ فَانظُرْ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الظَّالِمِينَ

"So We seized him and his troops and We threw them all into the sea [and drowned them]. So behold what was the end of the wrongdoers" (*al-Qasas* 40).

It is these kinds of lessons and points that the reader should be seeking from the stories found in the Quran. These stories are not meant for "pure enjoyment," but their purpose is to present very important morals and teachings. When a

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[1] Quoted from *Tafseer ibn Katheer* by al-Wukail, vol. 2, p. 156.

person becomes more concerned with learning about details not mentioned in the Quran or when he reads these stories as if he is reading a storybook, he will be losing the great benefit of these stories. He will be missing a great deal of guidance that the Quran has to offer.

Reciting the Quran as a Protection from Evil

Different hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him) describe specific portions of the Quran as having the ability to protect its Muslim reader from certain types of evil. For example, in a hadith in *Sahih al-Bukhari*, it states that a devil told Abu Hurairah, "When you go to your bed recite the verse of the throne [*al-Baqarah* 255], from, 'Allah, there is no god but He, the Living, the Eternal,' to the end of the verse. If you do so a guardian from Allah will come and protect you from the devils until the morning." Later, the Prophet (peace be upon him) told Abu Hurairah about that statement, "He [that devil] has told the truth although he is a liar."

The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) also said,

لا تَجْعَلُوا بُيُوتَكُمْ مَقَابِرَ إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ يَنْفِرُ مِنَ الْبَيْتِ الَّذِي تُقْرَأُ فِيهِ سُورَةُ الْبَقَرَةِ

"Do not turn your houses into graves. Verily, Satan flees from a house in which *soorah al-Baqarah* is recited."[1]

There is no question that this is a true characteristic of the Quran. The Muslim, though, has to realize that the Quran is supposed to be a protection from a much greater

[1] Recorded by Muslim.

evil: the Hell-fire. But it will not protect one from the Hell-fire unless one believes in it sincerely and applies it correctly. Again, if a person simply turns to the Quran and reads portions of it thinking that it will protect him from some evil in this life and he does not go beyond that to understand and apply the Quran properly in his life, he will be missing the real point of what the Quran is all about.

The Ruling Concerning Hanging the Quran for Protection

This aspect has even led some people to hang portions of the Quran around their necks, in their cars and so forth as a protection from evil.[1] This practice has become very widespread nowadays. Unfortunately, for some people it has become their only use of the Quran. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss its ruling in some detail here.

The items worn around the neck or hung somewhere as sources of protection are known as *tamaaim* (تمائم) or amulets. In general, if anyone wears something of this nature and believes that the thing itself has power and can protect him, then he is committing an act of *shirk* (associating partners with Allah). The Prophet (peace be upon him) said,

مَنْ عَلَّقَ تَمِيمَةً فَقَدْ أَشْرَكَ

"Whoever hangs an amulet has committed *shirk* (associated partners with Allah."[2] This is the greater form of *shirk*

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[1] These reproductions of the Quran are usually so tiny that they are impossible to read. Hence, it is clear that they were made simply for the purpose of being worn or hung and not for the purpose of being read and applied.

[2] Recorded by Ahmad and al-Haakim. According to al-Suyooti and al-Albaani, it is *sahih*. There are also other hadith that give the same meaning.

because the person believes that such an item has some power to bring him benefit or avert harm from him. This violates *tauheed* wherein one must believe that Allah alone has power over all things. Additionally, the person's heart is putting his hope and trust into that amulet. This is a further violation of *tauheed*.[1]

There is, though, some difference of opinion over the wearing of an amulet which consists of the Quran or parts of it. Many scholars say that these types of amulets are also prohibited and are not an exception to the general rule stated above. Scholars of this view include ibn Masood, ibn Abbaas, Ibraaheem al-Nakha'ee, one narration from Ahmad, later Hanbali scholars and others. Those who say that such amulets are permissible include Aishah, Abdullah ibn Amr ibn al-As, Saeed ibn al-Musayyab, Malik, ibn Abdul Barr, al-Baihaqi, al-Qurtubi, ibn Taimiyah, ibn al-Qayyim, ibn Hajr and others.[2] It is important to note, as al-Suhaimi does, that the majority of the scholars of the second view are of the opinion that it is permissible to wear such an amulet after an affliction occurs. However, it is not permissible to wear it before an affliction occurs; that is, it is not permissible to wear it before an affliction thinking that it is the thing that is going to protect one from the affliction.[3] In fact, the important quote from Aishah on this issue is, "An amulet is what is worn before an affliction occurs. What is worn afterwards is not considered an amulet."[4]

See Fahd al-Suhaimi, *Ahkaam al-Ruqa wa al-Tamaaim* (Madinah: Adhwaa al-Salaf, 1998), p. 221.

1 Cf., al-Suhaimi, p. 238.

2 Cf., al-Suhaimi, pp. 244-245.

3 Al-Suhaimi, p. 245. Another good discussion of this topic may be found in Sulaimaan al-Ghasn, *Aqeedah al-Imaam ibn Abdul Barr fi al-Tauheed wa al-Imaan* (Riyadh: Daar al-Aasimah, 1996), pp. 278-284.

4 Cf., al-Suhaimi, p. 249.

This is not the proper place to enter into a lengthy discussion of this disputed issue.[1] Regardless of the permissibility or impermissibility of hanging the Quran or portions of it as protection, the important point is that the real protection from evil is not by hanging the Quran around the neck, but it is attained by believing in it, understanding it and applying it one's life. The Prophet (peace be upon him) never instructed anyone to make an amulet of the Quran but he instructed his followers to read, learn and implement the Quran.

Recitation of the Quran Without Pondering over Its Meaning and Acting Accordingly[2]

The above are some of the main reasons why many Muslims turn to the Quran. They neglect the main purpose of the Quran and busy themselves with these secondary—although true— facets of the Quran. In reality, this turning to the Quran for its "secondary purposes" only is one of the gravest travesties in the history of mankind.

However, they are yet others who turn to the Quran sincerely and hoping to achieve its guidance. Sadly though,

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1 Al-Suhaimi, after discussing the viewpoints of both sides in detail, concludes that it is not permissible to wear an amulet that consists solely of the Quran or parts of it, both before or after an affliction occurs. Cf., al-Suhaimi, pp. 243-253. Al-Suhaimi's conclusion seems to be the correct conclusion on this question. It is also the conclusion of Abdul Azeez ibn Baaz. See Abdul Azeez ibn Baaz, *Fatawa wa Tanbeehaat wa Nasaaih* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Sunnah, 1989), p. 214.

2 Earlier those who read the Quran simply for the sake of blessings were discussed. Here, those who read the Quran not just for the sake of blessings but to actually learn from it are discussed. However, their manner of reading is such that they never take the time to ponder over the Quran or study its deeper meaning from the relevant sources. Hence, although they read the Quran, what they get from their reading is not as much as it could be.

as shall be described below, the manner in which many of them read the Quran does not assist them very much in their goal.

This chapter began with the Quranic verse,

وَقَالَ الرَّسُولُ يَارَبِّ إِنَّ قَوْمِي اتَّخَذُوا هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ مَهْجُورًا

"The Messenger said, 'O Lord, my people have taken this Quran as something *mahjoor* (to be avoided or shunned)'" (*al-Furqaan* 30). Undoubtedly, one of the greatest ways of taking the Quran as something *mahjoor*, as discussed earlier, is to not even recite or read the Quran on a regular basis. But even many of those who do recite the Quran fail to do it in the manner that it should be done. Some Muslims *only* recite the Quran while waiting for the prayer. Many do their best to read the Quran during the month of Ramadhaan while the rest of the year they are negligent with respect to reading the Quran. Furthermore, many people recite it in such a quick manner that it is nearly impossible to make out the individual words that the person is reciting. It is clear that this type of reading is not reading the Quran to learn the Quran.

In the same way that the benefits of the stories of the Quran, the benefits of the verses related to science and other facets were discussed, it is important here to note the recommended way of reading the Quran such that one may truly benefit from his reading.

Reading the Quran to Ponder over It and to Act upon It

It is disheartening that many people do not read the Quran (or other important Islamic texts) with a clear mind and in a proper setting, reading slowly and closely to capture the meaning of what is being read. Sometimes when Muslims

read about Islam, whether the Quran or other Islamic literature, they do so when they have leisure time, nothing else to do or less than full energy to read in a more serious manner. On the other hand, when reading other types of works, for example, material related to work or study, they are careful to pick the best place and time to study those materials to make sure that they do not miss anything important from those works. Often times, they will take notes from those works and mark important portions while they do not bother to take notes while reading the Quran.

It is the Quran that deserves to be read under the best circumstances for learning so that the reader can understand the guidance it possesses. It is meant to be understood, pondered over and acted upon. When a person does that, he will, by the will of Allah, receive the blessings and guidance that the Quran contains. Allah says,

كِتَابٌ أَنزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ مُبَارَكٌ لِيَدَّبَّرُوا آيَاتِهِ وَلِيَتَذَكَّرَ أُولُوا الأَلْبَابِ

"Here is a Book which We have sent down unto you, full of blessings, that they may meditate on its verses, and that men of understanding may receive admonition" (*Saad* 29). After quoting this verse, al-Fauzaan wrote,

> Allah has made it clear in this verse that the [first] goal of revealing the Quran is for its verses to be pondered over. That is, we should think about their meanings, their implications, their intricate points and their information until we are able to derive from them guidance and we get from them [the result that we] fear Allah and worship Him alone without ascribing any partner to Him and that we know what we should do and should not do with respect to deeds, statements, dealings and so forth. This will not come completely to

> someone and this will not be achieved except by pondering over the Quran."[1]

In addition to what al-Fauzaan mentioned, pondering over the verses also includes having a strong connection and complete attention to the Quran when reading it. When the person is completely attuned to what he is reading, he then begins to ask Allah for forgiveness whenever he comes across a verse that he has not fulfilled properly. Whenever he reads a verse concerning Allah's mercy, he responds by asking Allah for such mercy. Whenever he reads of Allah's punishment, he immediately seeks refuge in Allah from such punishment. This was the way of reading of the Prophet (peace be upon him), even during his reading of the Quran during his late-night voluntary prayers, as Muslim has recorded in his *Sahih*.[2]

A sign that one has truly pondered over the meaning of the Quran and is considering what it is saying is if it has the effect on him that Allah has described the Quran as having on the true believers:

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ إِذَا ذُكِرَ اللَّهُ وَجِلَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَإِذَا
تُلِيَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُهُ زَادَتْهُمْ إِيمَانًا وَعَلَى رَبِّهِمْ يَتَوَكَّلُونَ

"(True) believers are only those who when Allah is mentioned feel a tremor in their hearts, and when they hear His Signs recited, find their faith strengthened, and put (all) their trust in their Lord" (*al-Anfaal* 2).

If one simply recites the Quran, either in the mosque or at home, without actually thinking about its meaning and without it having any such effect on him, then it may be that he is treating the Quran in a way similar to how Allah describes the disbelievers as dealing with the Quran. Allah states,

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[1] Al-Fauzaan, vol. 2, p. 299.
[2] Cf., Abd Rabbihi, p. 99.

أَفَلا يَتَدَبَّرُونَ الْقُرْآنَ أَمْ عَلَى قُلُوبٍ أَقْفَالُهَا

"Have they not pondered over the Quran or is over their hearts a lock" (*Muhammad* 24).

It is recorded that the Prophet (peace be upon him) stood in prayer one night and when he came across the verse,

إِنْ تُعَذِّبْهُمْ فَإِنَّهُمْ عِبَادُكَ وَإِنْ تَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ فَإِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

"If You punish them, they are Your servants: if You forgive them, You art the Exalted in power, the Wise" (*al-Maaidah* 118), he continued to recite that verse over and over and ponder over it until morning.[1] Similarly reports have been narrated about the Companions Tameem al-Daari, Asmaa and ibn Masood, as they would ponder over one verse for hours at a time.[2]

The Companion ibn Abbaas is narrated to have said, "For me to read *soorah al-Baqarah* and *soorah ali-Imraan* slowly, precisely and with concentration [on their meanings] is more beloved to me than to read the entire Quran in a quick fashion."[3] Ali ibn Abu Taalib is also reported to have said, "There is no good in a reading without knowing what [one has read] and there is no goodness in knowledge without understanding and there is no goodness in worship that contains no concentration."[4]

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1 Recorded by al-Nasaai, ibn Maajah, al-Haakim. According to al-Albaani, it is *hasan*. See Muhammad Naasir al-Deen al-Albaani, *Saheeh Sunan al-Nasaai* (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Tarbiyyah al-Arabi li-Duwal al-Khaleej, 1988), vol. 1, p. 218.

2 Cf., Haafidh al-Hakami, *Al-Naseehah li-Kitaab Allah* (al-Damam, Saudi Arabia: Daar ibn al-Jauzi, 1995), p. 62.

3 Quoted in Mustafa, p. 32.

4 Quoted in al-Zabeedi (vol. 5, p. 87) from Abu Nuaim's *Hilyat al-Auliyaa*. Such a statement is also narrated as a hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him) but the scholars are agreed that it is most apparently a statement of Ali rather than a hadith. See al-Zuhairi's footnotes to ibn

Ibn Ashoor states that the jurists of his school stress that reading less of the Quran but with concentration and understanding is better than reading more of it while not comprehending it.[1]

There are numerous important benefits that result from pondering over the Quran in the proper manner. Al-Saadi notes that pondering over the Quran is the key to knowledge and understanding. From it, one can derive all good. From such pondering, one's faith is increased and its fruits are watered because one begins to know his Lord and object of worship. One also sees the path to pleasing his Lord and the path that leads to one's destruction. The more the person ponders over the Quran, the greater his knowledge, deeds and awareness.[2]

One must never, though, get the goals confused with the means. Pondering over the meaning of the Quran is not the ends in itself. It is only part of the means to apply the Quran. The goal is to believe completely, understand correctly and apply the Quran properly in one's life.[3] Al-Fauzaan astutely noted,

> If we stopped at just reciting and pondering over the Quran and we leave acting [according to it], we have stopped at the beginning of the road and we have not attained anything. All of our efforts would have been lost without any benefit from them as we would have tired ourselves on the steps and we would have abandoned the fruits. This is because the fruit [of the efforts of reading and pondering] is the acting in accordance with the Quran. Allah, perfect and exalted be He, said,

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Abdul Barr, vol. 2, pp. 811-812; Muhammad Naasir al-Deen al-Albaani, *Silsilat al-Ahaadeeth al-Dhaeefah* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islaami, 1399 A.H.), vol. 2, pp. 162-163

1 Ibn Ashoor, vol. 1, p. 29.

2 Al-Saadi, p. 154.

3 Cf., Abu Abdul Rahmaan, *Kaifa Tataathur bi-l-Quran wa Kaifa Tahfidhuhu* (Al-Khobar, Saudi Arabia: 1992), p. 24.

> "Those who recite the Book of Allah, establish regular prayer, and spend out of what We have provided for them, secretly and openly, hope for a commerce that will never fail. He will pay them their wages, nay, He will give them (even) more out of His Bounty; for He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Ready to appreciate (service)" (*Faatir* 29-30). These verses show that they did not stop at recitation but, in fact, they established the prayer after they had established the practice of reciting the Quran. Similarly, they gave out of what Allah had provided for them by giving the zakat, charity and doing acts of goodness toward the creation. That is the fruit of recitation, it is the acting in accord with it. If you act in accord with it, it will be a proof for you while if you do not act in accord with it, it will be a proof against you. The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said, "The Quran is a proof for you or a proof against you."[1]

The Companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) understood very well what were the means and what were the goals behind reading and studying the Quran. They gave the goal preference over the means. Perhaps, Allah knows best, this is why Abdullah ibn Masood could say, "It was difficult [relatively speaking] for us to memorize the wording of the Quran but it was easy for us to act upon it. For the people who came after us, it was easy for them to memorize the Quran but difficult for them to act upon it."[2]

Manners of Reciting the Quran

As just stated, a Muslim should do his best to ponder over the meaning of the Quran and understand what Allah

1 Al-Fauzaan, vol. 2, p. 302.
2 Quoted in Abd Rabbihi, p. 112.

wants from him. Therefore, he should pick the best time, place and atmosphere for its recital. This is why the scholars of Islam have discussed the manners that one should attend to while reading the Quran. This will put the person in the proper spiritual and mental atmosphere to benefit from the Quran. As al-Khaalidi stated,

> In order for the recital of the Quran to be beneficial and in order for it to reap its fruits and the proper results of pondering, acting and being affected by it, and in order for it to be performed in the manner of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) and his noble Companions, there are certain etiquette that the one who recites must take note of and adhere to just before and while reciting the Quran.[1]

Some of the manners that the scholars have mentioned concerning reciting the Quran come from the Quran, hadith and guidance of the Companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Others actually have no direct source in the Quran or hadith. At the same time, though, they have been offered by the scholars, based on their experience of reading of the Quran, as they felt that they would also be helpful to others who read the Quran and wish to gain the guidance the Quran offers.[2]

Note once again that the means and the goal cannot be confused. All of these different etiquette are not meant for exoteric reasons but they are for the purpose of being able to

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[1]Al-Khaalidi, p. 45.

[2]Many scholars have discussed the etiquette regarding the recitation and reading of the Quran. See, for example, al-Nawawi, pp. 14-93; Jallaal al-Deen al-Suyooti, *Al-Itqaan fi Uloom al-Quran* (Beirut: Dar al-Marifa, 1978), vol. 1, pp. 136-147. The following works In English cover the topic but in less detail: Ahmad von Denffer, *Ulum al-Quran: An Introduction to the Sciences of the Quran* (Leicester, UK: The Islamic Foundation, 1983), pp. 165-167; Murad, pp. 46-68.

best understand and grasp what one is reading.[1] The goal is the heart: the heart must be completely attuned and realize what is being read. In a lengthy passage, ibn al-Qayyim aptly describes what is needed for one to benefit from one's reading of the Quran. His discussion is based on the verse,

إن في ذلك لذكرى لمن كان له قلب أو ألقى السمع وهو شهيد

"Verily in this is a message for any who has a heart and understanding or who gives ear and is earnestly present" (*Qaaf* 37). Ibn al-Qayyim states that in a most succinct manner, this verse describes exactly the conditions that one must meet in order to benefit from hearing Allah's revelation. He must have a "heart"; this is the "receptacle" that is to receive the message. If this receptacle is not ready, is not open to the message or is dead to the message, it will not be able to receive anything, even if the lips should happen to be reading the message. Second, Allah mentions that "the person must give ear", in other words, he must be listening intently, a type of listening wherein the person tries to comprehend what is being said. Third, Allah states that "he is present." Ibn al-Qayyim states that this means that his heart is present and attuned to what is being said. Therefore, if the Quran finds the proper receptacle— which is the living heart wanting Allah's guidance— and the proper conditions

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1 In essence, the same can be said about reciting the Quran in "the most beautiful manner." The goal of this beautification is not simply to make the Quran pleasing to listen to in an artistic sense. The goal is to make the listener moved by the Quran and make him feel Allah's words. In fact, by definition, the one who recites the Quran most beautifully is the one who recites it in a way that one feels that he is having the fear of Allah. This is indicated in the hadith with states, "The person who has the best recitation is the one who, when he recites, you see that he fears Allah." (Recorded by al-Baihaqi in *Shab al-Imaan*, al-Khateeb al-Baghdaadi in *Tareekh Baghdaad*, Muhammad ibn Nasr in *Kitaab al-Salaat* and others. According to al-Albaani, it is *sahih*. See al-Albaani, *Saheeh al-Jaami*, vol. 1, p. 100.

are met— wherein the person is listening attentively to what Allah is saying— and there are no obstacles— such as the heart not being attuned by turning its thoughts to other things while the tongue alone is reading Allah's message— then the proper and desired effect will result: the person will benefit from the Quran and it will serve as a reminder and guide for him.[1]

Choosing the Proper Time for Reciting the Quran

The person should choose a time for reciting the Quran during which he would be most inclined to receiving the blessings and guidance of the Quran. This should be a time in which his mind is free of distractions. From the Quran and different hadith it seems clear that two of the best times for reciting the Quran are the last third of the night and *fajr* time. Murad writes,

> Yet there are some specific times which are more desirable as they are recommended by the Quran and the Prophet, blessings and peace be on him; those moments are more rewarding and fruitful...The most excellent time to read is at night...Reading the Quran during the night-prayers enables your heart to remain with your reading and strengthens your will in surrendering yourself to Allah's guidance and fulfilling the mission He has entrusted you...The great need and immense benefits of reading the Quran in Prayer during the night however remain. Hence you should assign at least some time, however little, even a few minutes with some regular frequency, however long, say weekly or even monthly, for this purpose.[2]

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[1] Cf., ibn al-Qayyim, *al-Fawaaid*, p. 3.
[2] Murad, pp. 61-62.

Related to this concept is the suggestion that the person free his mind from all other preoccupations. If there is something on somebody's mind while he is reading the Quran and he is easily able to take care of that matter, he should tend to it first and then return to read the Quran. If, for example, someone needs to relieve himself, make an important phone call or something similar to that which he will always have on his mind while reciting the Quran, he should tend to those simple things first and then continue his recital.[1]

However, it is difficult to determine how often and how much one should read of the Quran on a regular basis.[2] It is clear from the sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and the actions of the Companions that they would not let any day pass without reading at least some portion of the Quran.

Al-Nawawi records that some of the Companions would regularly complete the entire Quran every two months while others would do so monthly; still some completed it once a week or every six days and so on.[3] How much and how often one reads the Quran, therefore, will depend upon individual capabilities and limitations that differ from person

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[1]This is analogous to the case of the person who needs to relieve himself before the prayer begins but goes ahead and performs the prayer first. This action is considered *makrooh* (disliked). Although there is no direct evidence suggesting that reading the Quran while in that condition is also *makrooh*, there is no question that this condition may affect the person's attentiveness and ability to comprehend what he has read.

[2] According to al-Maqdisi, if a person has a copy of the Quran in his house, he must read at least a few verses from it daily in order not to treat it as something *mahjoor* (abandoned, avoided). [See Ahmad ibn Qudaamah al-Maqdisi, *Mukhtasar Minhaaj al-Qasideen* (Damascus: Maktabah Daar al-Bayaan, 1978), p. 53.] It has been narrated of a number of Companions, including Uthmaan ibn Affaan and Umar ibn al-Khattaab, that they would dislike to have a day go by in which they did not look at and read from their copy of the Quran. [See al-Zabeedi, vol. 5, pp. 70-71.]

[3]Yahya al-Nawawi, *Al-Tibyaan fi Adab Hamlati-l-Quran* (Beirut: Daar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1965), p. 30.

to person. The important aspect is to want to read the Quran as often as possible, to understand it properly and to apply it to the best of one's ability.

In addition, one should not try to read the entire Quran too quickly. The purpose of reading the Quran is to understand it and benefit from its guidance. When one reads it too quickly, it is not possible for him to comprehend or ponder over its meaning. This was pointed out by the Prophet (peace be upon him) when he said,

لا يفقه من قرأ القرآن في أقل من ثلاث

"The one who reads the Quran in less than three days will not comprehend it."[1]

In fact, even when reading individual *soorah*s, the person's goal should not simply be the completion of the

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[1]Recorded by Abu Dawood, al-Tirmidhi and al-Baihaqi. Al-Albaani graded it *sahih*. Al-Albaani, *Saheeh al-Jaami*, vol. 2, p. 1279. It has been narrated from many of the early Muslims, including the Companion Uthmaan ibn Affaan, that they would recite the entire Quran in much less than three days, perhaps nightly or even in a shorter period. The majority of the scholars, as al-Zarkashi stated, are of the opinion that this depends on the person's own ability to read, understand and comprehend. One may read it in less than three days if he has the ability to understand it in a shorter period. (See al-Zarkashi, vol. 1, p. 471.) Al-Iraaqi notes that the hadith above does not state that if someone reads the Quran in less than three days that he is doing something forbidden; it simply states that he will not be able to understand it. (Quoted in al-Zabeedi, vol. 5, p. 29.) However, to this author, and Allah knows best, the meaning of the above hadith is clear and should be adhered to. Those who read the Quran in less than three days may have done so based on their own personal reasoning that this hadith is not one prohibiting the act, because they were not aware of this hadith or as a means of not forgetting the Quran but not as a means of reading it for study and understanding. Undoubtedly, the safest approach is to follow what was clearly stated by the Prophet (peace be upon him) and if one wants to understand the Quran, he should not try to read it in its entirety in less than three days.

soorah. Ibn Masood once said, "[Do not read it] in the manner that one throws out dates or in the quick manner that one reads poetry. Instead, stop at every one of its magnificent points and allow your heart to be moved by it. None of you should be thinking just about reaching the end of the *soorah*."[1]

Choosing the Proper Place for Reciting the Quran

Many have noted that the more "spiritual" the place, the greater the person will be attuned to what he is reading. Similarly, if the place is free of distractions, of any kind, including children's noises, others talking, and so on, the more the person will be able to concentrate on the Quran.[2] Obviously, the mosque should give the proper atmosphere and be one of the best places to read the Quran.

For women, if possible, they may wish to set aside a portion of their residence as their "mosque." This would be an area wherein no objects of distraction would be present. Furthermore, especially if the woman has children, it would be helpful of the husband to assist his wife in her reading of the Quran by making sure the children do not bother her while she is studying the Quran.

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[1]Quoted in Abu Bakr al-Ajuri, *Akhlaaq Ahl al-Quran* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1987), p. 38.

[2]Many people like to listen to the Quran on cassette tapes while driving a car or other similar activities. In those cases, the person does not give the Quran his full attention. Such people must make sure that they also read the Quran under circumstances wherein they are able to give the Quran their undivided attention.

Sitting in a Way that Gives Respect to What One Is Reading

Although this is not explicitly mentioned in any authentic hadith and, indeed, Allah praises those who remember Him standing, sitting or while lying on their sides, many scholars believe that there is a relationship between the way one sits while reciting the Quran and how much one benefits from said recital. They suggest facing the *qiblah*[1] and sitting in the same posture that one sits in while in prayer. Perhaps sitting in a special manner to read the Quran will remind the reader that what he is reading is special. Murad notes,

> Why are postures of body important? The 'outward' makes a tremendous impact upon the 'inward' of a man. The 'presence' of the body helps keep the 'heart' present. There ought to be a vast difference in your physical attitude while reading the Quran in comparison with an ordinary book. Hence many rules of etiquette and manner have been suggested.[2]

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1 Many scholars, including al-Nawawi (p. 42), record hadith stating that the best sitting is that wherein the person is facing the *qiblah*. There is, for example, a hadith that states, "Everything has a most noble aspect to it and the most noble sitting is wherein one faces the *qiblah*." (Recorded by al-Tabaraani in *al-Ausat*.) The chain of this hadith, which could be used to support the view that one should face the *qiblah* while reading the Quran, was graded *hasan* by scholars such as al-Haithami, al-Sakhaawi and al-Mundhiri. However, upon closer inspection, as Muhammad Amr Abdul Lateef noted, the chain of the hadith is good all except for al-Tabaraani's own source, Ibraaheem ibn Muhammad al-Himsi, who, as al-Dhahabi described him, is not reliable. Hence, the chain is weak. See Muhammad Amr Abdul Lateef, *Tabyeedh al-Saheefah bi-Usool al-Haadeeth al-Dhaeefah* (Giza, Egypt: Maktabah al-Tauiyyah al-Islaamiyyah, 1409), part 1, pp. 46-49. For more such hadith, also see Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albaani, *Dhaeef al-Jaami al-Sagheer* (Beirut: Al-Maktab al-Islaami, 1988), hadith numbers 876, 1124 and 1934.

2 Murad, p. 50.

Elsewhere in his work, Murad makes the following comment concerning this etiquette,

> To read the Quran while sitting on a chair, resting against a pillow, lying in bed or on a couch is not desirable, but is not prohibited. But never do so without excuse[1], nor make it a habit. However, if one totally misses reading the Quran only because one cannot afford to sit in a proper posture, one loses something more precious.[2]

Again, there is nothing explicit about this in any text of the Quran or sunnah. Murad's statements are somewhat strong. If a person finds that sitting in a certain respectable fashion improves his reading and understanding of the Quran, then it is good for him to sit in that fashion. However, it cannot be considered a must. The most important point is the last point he made: One should do his best to read the Quran and not allow a certain posture, such as lying down, to keep him from reading since there is nothing explicitly disapproving or forbidding such an act.

Being Free of Both Major and Minor Impurities

The question of whether or not it is permissible to recite or touch the Quran while being in a state of ritual

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[1]In this statement, Murad has overemphasized the manner of sitting properly. Even if one reads while reclining, for example, without an "excuse," one cannot say that he is committing a sin. It is authentically narrated that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) read *soorah al-Fath* while riding upon his camel. (Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.) However, Murad's point is valid that if one has the opportunity to choose a certain way to sit, he should try to sit in the manner most appropriate for him to understand and ponder over what he is reading.

[2]Murad, p. 62.

impurity is a controversial topic.[1] However, it is clear from the general teachings of Islam that there is a relationship between esoteric purity and outward purity. If one really seeks the maximum benefit from reciting the Quran, he should be both physically and mentally prepared and pure to receive its blessings. Therefore, it is considered a good practice, if not obligatory, for anyone who is to recite the Quran to be free from both major and minor impurities.

There is evidence that proves, though, that it is disliked for the one who is sexually defiled to recite the Quran not to speak of touching the Quran until he makes the complete bath (Ar., *ghusl*).[2] The Prophet (peace be upon him) did not respond to a person's greeting until he had made ablution because he did not like to mention Allah's name except while in a state of purity.[3]

Having the Proper Intention upon Reading the Quran

In order for the person to be rewarded by Allah for his recital and in order for the reader to maximize his guidance from the Quran he must make his intention such

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[1] This topic is dealt with in detail by the author in "The Condition of *Tahara* for Reciting/Touching the Quran," *al-Basheer* (vol. 7, no. 6, March-April 1994), pp. 8-22. Allah willing, a revised version of that article will form part of the author's book, *The Quran: Its Virtues and Its Fiqh* (Boulder, CO: Al-Basheer Company for Publications and Translations, forthcoming, Allah willing).

[2]There is no proof that such an action is prohibited although it is disliked. The famous hadith stating that Ali reported that the only time the Prophet (peace be upon him) would remain away from reciting the Quran was when he was in a state of sexual defilement and which was recorded by ibn Khuzaima, al-Haakim and al-Daaraqutni is considered weak. See Muhammad Naasir al-Deen al-Albaani, *Irwaa al-Ghaleel fi Takhreej Ahaadeeth Manaar al-Sabeel* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islaami, 1979), vol. 2, pp. 241-245.

[3]Recorded by Muslim.

that he is not reading the Quran for any worldly benefit. Instead, he must read it solely for the sake of Allah, to please Allah and to get His guidance. This must be something clear in his conscience before he begins his reading of the Quran. The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said,

إِنَّمَا الأَعْمَالُ بِالنِّيَّاتِ وَإِنَّمَا لِكُلِّ امْرِئٍ مَا نَوَى

"Surely, all actions are but driven by intentions and, verily, every man shall have but that which he intended."[1]

Al-Khaalidi notes,

> The knowledge, understanding and pondering over the Quran is a pure blessing from Allah and a mercy from Him. And the mercy of Allah is not granted to someone whose heart is filled with confusion, deception and deceit.[2]

The question of a proper intention is of extreme importance with respect to every act of worship. However, it is of special importance with respect to reading and memorizing the Quran. This is because memorizing the Quran or reading it in a beautiful voice is often an act for which one becomes well-known. In other words, the word spreads quickly that a specific person has a beautiful recitation or has memorized so much of the Quran. Therefore, it is relatively easy for Satan to come to such a person and affect his intention. Instead of reading and learning the Quran for the sake of Allah, *to some extent* his learning and reading is being done for the sake of show and the accolades that he is receiving from the Muslims around him.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) alluded to this fact when he said,

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[1]Recorded by al-Bukhari, Muslim and others.

[2]Al-Khaalidi, p. 47.

إِنَّ أَكْثَرَ مُنَافِقِي أُمَّتِي قُرَّاؤُهَا

"Certainly, the majority of the hypocrites [in their deeds] from among my Nation are its Quranic reciters."[1] This hadith is not in reference to complete hypocrites who are hiding their disbelief and who, therefore, fall outside of the Nation of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Instead, it is referring to Muslims whose reading, memorizing and learning of the Quran is sometimes tainted by the fact that they are seeking the praise and adoration of the people.[2] In essence, this hadith is a warning from the Prophet (peace be upon him) to those who wish to learn, memorize and recite the Quran. It is a warning concerning a dangerous disease that can creep up on such people. Even though they put many, many hours into memorizing and reading the Quran in the most beautiful manner, due to their improper intention during some of that time, they may memorize the entire Quran but they may not be blessed with a complete and true understanding of the Quran.

Similarly, there are many others, including the true and complete hypocrites, Christian missionaries and non-Muslim Orientalists, who read the Quran but their reading is not a sincere reading to be guided by it. Instead, most of them read the Quran only to find fault with it or as a means of publishing some work. Hence, it is not surprising to see such people reading the Quran while it has no lasting effect on them and it does not guide them to the straight path. If a person sincerely seeks to get the guidance of the Quran, he must turn to the Quran with the intention of reading it for the sake of Allah and with the intention of finding and following the truth, whatever the truth may be.

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[1] Recorded by Ahmad and others. According to al-Albaani it is *sahih*; al-Huwaini also considers it an acceptable hadith. See al-Albaani, *Saheeh al-Jaami*, vol. 1, p. 263; al-Huwaini, footnotes to ibn Katheer, *Kitaab Fadhaail*, p. 295.

[2] Cf., al-Zabeedi, vol. 5, p. 21.

Turning to Allah and Seeking His Guidance

Allah says in the Quran,

لَقَدْ أَنزَلْنَا آيَاتٍ مُبَيِّنَاتٍ وَاللَّهُ يَهْدِي مَن يَشَاءُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ

"We have indeed sent down signs that make things clear. And Allah guides whom He wills to a path that is straight" (*al-Noor* 46). The clear signs have come from Allah. However, the one who reads the Quran must realize that its guidance will only come to him if Allah wills it so. Guidance is in the hand of Allah and He gives it to whomsoever He wills, according to His divine justice and mercy. This fact must be very clear in everyone's heart. The reader must turn to Allah while reading the Quran realizing that the benefits of the Quran will only come because of his sincerity to Allah.

Seeking Refuge from Satan upon Reading the Quran

Allah says in the Quran,

فَإِذَا قَرَأْتَ الْقُرْآنَ فَاسْتَعِذْ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ

"When you read the Quran, seek Allah's protection from Satan, the rejected one" (*al-Nahl* 98).[1]

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[1] According to the majority of scholars, one should seek refuge in Allah before reading the Quran. Another opinion is that one does so after finishing one's reading of the Quran while a third opinion states that one does so before and after finishing reading the Quran. However, the first view, that it is to be said before reading the Quran, is the most accepted and some claim a consensus on that point. See *al-Mausooah al-Fiqhiyyah* (Kuwait: Wazaarah al-Auqaaf wa al-Shuoon al-Islaamiyyah, 1993), vol. 4, pp. 6-7; ibn Katheer, *Tafseer al-Quran al-Adheem*, p. 20. According to ibn Katheer (p. 20), one of the reasons given for seeking refuge in Allah after

Ibn al-Qayyim has given the wisdom behind seeking refuge in Allah from Satan before reading the Quran:

1. The Quran is a healing for whatever is in the heart; it removes whatever comes from Satan, be it his evil whisperings, lusts or evil desires. It is the antidote to what Satan has put into the heart. So first the person is asked to reject whatever is in his heart from the acts of Satan. Therefore, the medicine will find the heart free and can take its proper place and have its proper effect. As is said in poetry, "Her desire came to me before I knew the desire/And it met my heart empty so it took root therein." So this healthy medicine comes to the heart and cleanses it from what can damage it. And it becomes successful therein.

2. The Quran is the source of guidance, knowledge and good in the heart of the reader, in the same way that water is the source that brings forth plants. Satan is a fire that burns down the plants, one by one. For every good plant that springs in the heart, Satan attempts to destroy it and burn it down. And Allah orders us to seek refuge in Him in order for Him to ruin what Satan is attempting to do. The first point stated above deals with the benefits of the Quran while this point actually deals with the preservation and remaining of the Quran in the heart.

3. The angels descend upon the one who reads the Quran and listen to its recitation. This has been related in a hadith in which Usaid ibn Hudhair was reciting the Quran and he saw a canopy with lamps in it. The Prophet (peace be upon him) told him that those were angels. And the devils are the

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reciting is so the person does not become overly pleased and amazed with himself due to the act of worship that he just completed.

opposite of the angels and are their enemies. The one who reads the Quran has been ordered to ask Allah that he should be put far away from his enemy, the devils, until he is in the midst of only angels. This situation cannot possibly be occupied by both the angels and the devils at the same time.

4. Satan tries to disturb the one who reads the Quran with his steeds and feet until the reader is void of the meanings of the Quran. The reader should try to ponder over and understand the words of Allah. Satan tries to come between his heart and the meaning of the Quran. Thus the reader is not able to benefit from the Quran. Therefore we have been ordered to seek refuge from this Satan when we are about to read the Quran.

5. The reader of the Quran is in a private conversation with Allah. And Allah listens closer to His words when recited in a pleasant way than a singer listens to her song. The song of Satan is poetry and music. The reader has been ordered to seek refuge from Satan so Satan will be removed from the private conversation and Allah will listen to the person's recital.

6. Allah has stated that whenever He sent a Messenger or a Prophet, Satan has always tried to interfere in what he is preaching by bringing words or ideas that do not originate with Allah. The early scholars all agreed that this meant that when one is reciting, Satan throws some words or such into the recital. If this was done with respect to the Prophets, what must be the case with respect to others? This is why the reciter sometimes will make mistakes. And why he sometimes gets confused and cannot recite

properly. Or his mind and his heart becomes confused. When he begins to recite, he might find one of these, if not all of them, occurring.

7. Whenever a person contemplates the doing of a good deed, Satan becomes even more zealous in his attempts to come between the person and the good deed, to prevent the person from doing the good deed. [Therefore, we are asked to seek refuge in Allah in order for Satan to be prevented from stopping us from this good deed.][1]

Ibn Taimiyyah elaborated on that last point when he said that the one who prays has to face more of Satan's whispering than one who does not pray. The same is true for those who are students of knowledge. This is because they are greater enemies to Satan and he makes his attack on them more fierce. One of the moments in which Satan is most likely to attack humans is when they try to read the Quran. It is this moment when the person is in most need of seeking Allah's protection from Satan so that he will be able to benefit from his reading of the Quran.[2]

Finally, ibn Katheer notes then when seeking refuge in Allah from Satan— in general, not just upon reading the Quran— one recognizes his own inability to defeat that hostile but hidden enemy. That enemy cannot be repelled like evil humans by behaving kindly toward him or by some type of "bribe." Instead, one must turn only to Allah to repel that enemy and allow the person to freely read and benefit from the Quran.[3]

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[1]Quoted from Umar S. al-Ashqar, *The World of the Jinn and Devils* (Boulder: Al-Basheer Company for Publications and Translations, 1998), pp. 176-178.

[2] Cf., Ahmad ibn Taimiyyah, *Majmoo Fatawa ibn Taimiyyah*, vol. 7, p. 282.

[3] Ibn Katheer, *Tafseer al-Quran al-Adheem*, p. 21.

Summary

This chapter was not meant to downplay any of the true and important aspects related to the reading of the Quran. It was only meant to show that these true factors are not all that there is to the Quran. There is much more that the Quran has to offer— its "major goals" that are described in the next chapter. If the reader does not have those as his main objectives in reading the Quran, he would be similar to a person who has purchased the most sophisticated computer available and uses it only for playing games.

Chapter 5
The "Major Goals" of the Quran

In order to maximize the benefit of reading any book, the reader should recognize and keep in mind the main goal of the book he is reading. When reading the book, the main purpose of the book should be foremost in the readers' mind so he can evaluate and analyze any portion of the book in the light of the book's main goal. What a person desires to get from a book greatly affects the manner in which he reads the book. If a person wants to read a specific book for leisure or pleasure, he will not care if he actually comprehends or retains all of the work. If a person is reading a book because he will be tested on the contents of the book, such as a student in a university, he will do his best to read the book carefully and try to retain as much as he can and, furthermore, he will only read those chapters that he feels are relevant to the examination. Thus, how a person perceives a book and what he desires to get out of it are very important matters that one will consider, consciously or unconsciously, before reading any book.

The same can be said with respect to the Quran.[1] For example, if a Muslim is reading the book simply for the sake of blessings, his reading can be very quick and he does not have to worry about comprehension or retention. If a Muslim opens the Quran and starts reading it without even realizing what Allah is trying to show him or teach him, he may not

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[1]Obviously the Quran is the speech of Allah and although Allah refers to it as "a book," it is not proper to look at it in the same way that one looks at any other book. It is hoped that the reader will benefit from the lesson of this similitude and ignore any unfortunate ramifications of the similitude itself.

benefit much from the Quran. His reading will be a kind of aimless reading without any real goal or purpose. He will, perhaps, put it down without it having any real effect on him. However, if the same person should read the Quran keeping in mind what the Quran is and what its main goals are, reading and evaluating each passage in the light of those goals, the benefit and effect of his reading will be greater, Allah willing.

Therefore, one should keep in mind the major goals of the Quran that are described below.

Teaching the Creation about Allah, His Oneness and Attributes

There is no question that guiding the creation to the understanding and implications of Allah's Oneness and Uniqueness (*tauheed*) is the overriding purpose of the Quran.[1] It is part of the nature of a human to want to know Allah, his Lord and Creator. It is the Quran that eloquently tells the human about his Lord such that he will then recognize the signs of his Lord, appreciate His actions and know His attributes.[2] Through these teachings found in the

[1]It is surprising that al-Khaalidi could discuss the major goals of the Quran in his work *Mafaateeh* and yet not once explicitly mention this as a major goal of the Quran. See al-Khaalidi, *Mafaateeh*, pp. 70-75. Fortunately, in another one of his works, a study of Sayyid Qutb's view of the Quran, he does mention it explicitly. See Salaah Abdul Fattaah al-Khaalidi, *Al-Minhaaj al-Haraki fi Dhilaal al-Quran* (Jedda: Dar al-Manaarah, 1986), pp. 58-68.

[2]Obviously the human mind or intellect cannot discover this information by itself as it is well beyond its limitations. All philosophers who have tried to determine the nature or attributes of God without the aid of revelation have ended in confusion and frustration. The only reliable source for this kind of information is revelation from Allah Himself.

Quran, the human will increase his love and adoration for his Lord. He will worship Him with greater intensity and love and he will be a more devoted servant of Him.[1]

Through Allah's clear description of His complete power over all things, His complete power to punish and His justice, the human learns to fear his Lord because of his own sins and shortcomings toward Him. At the same time, Allah's clear description of His forgiveness and great mercy as well as the generous rewards He grants to the believers for their belief and good deeds increases the human's hope in Allah. Hence, all of these aspects of the Quran are intended to help the human know his Lord, have the proper relationship toward Him and to have the feelings in his heart that make him act properly towards Allah.

Thus when one reads the Quran, he should realize that he is reading about his God and Lord. The Quran is answering those basic human questions for him: Who is my Creator and God? What is my relationship to Him? Why did He create me? But, more importantly, Allah is telling the human about Himself so the human may draw closer to Him and increase his adoration and worship of Him.

That this is one of the overriding purposes of the Quran can be seen in the following hadith wherein the Prophet (peace be upon him) identifies the greatest or most virtuous verse in the Quran:

عَنْ أُبَيِّ بْنِ كَعْبٍ قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ يَا أَبَا الْمُنْذِرِ أَتَدْرِي أَيُّ آيَةٍ مِنْ كِتَابِ اللَّهِ مَعَكَ أَعْظَمُ قَالَ قُلْتُ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ

[1]Those philosophers of Islam who turned away from or denied Allah's clear descriptions of His attributes had, as is clear from their writings, a very empty and hollow conception of God, void of any real feelings of the heart.

أعْلَمُ قالَ يا أبا المُنْذِرِ أتَدْرِي أيُّ آيَةٍ مِنْ كِتابِ اللهِ مَعَكَ أعْظَمُ قالَ قُلْتُ (اللَّهُ لا إِلَهَ إلاَّ هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ) قالَ فَضَرَبَ فِي صَدْرِي وقالَ واللهِ لِيَهْنِكَ الْعِلْمُ أبا الْمُنْذِرِ

Ubayy ibn Kaab narrated that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said [to me], "O Abu al-Mundhir, do you know which verse of the Book of Allah with you is the greatest?" I said, "Allah and His Messenger know best." He [again] said, "O Abu al-Mundhir, do you know which verse of the Book of Allah with you is the greatest?" I said, "[The verse,] 'Allah, there is no God but He, the Ever-Living, the Ever-Sustaining'?" He then struck my chest and said, "By Allah, may knowledge be made pleasant for you [as you answered correctly]."[1]

The verse referred to in that hadith is verse 255 of *soorah al-Baqarah* (known as the "verse of the Footstool"). The verse reads,

اللَّهُ لا إِلَهَ إِلاَّ هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ لا تَأْخُذُهُ سِنَةٌ وَلا نَوْمٌ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الأَرْضِ مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَشْفَعُ عِنْدَهُ إِلاَّ بِإِذْنِهِ يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ وَلا يُحِيطُونَ بِشَيْءٍ مِنْ عِلْمِهِ إِلاَّ بِمَا شَاءَ وَسِعَ كُرْسِيُّهُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالأَرْضَ وَلا يَئُودُهُ حِفْظُهُمَا وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْعَظِيمُ

"Allah! There is no god but He, the Ever-Living, the Self-subsisting, Eternal. No fatigue overcomes Him nor sleep. His

1 Recorded by Muslim.

are all things in the heavens and on earth. Who is there who can intercede in His presence except as He permits? He knows what (appears to His creatures as) before or after or behind them. Nor shall they compass anything of His knowledge except as He wills. His Footstool extends over the heavens and the earth, and He feels no fatigue in guarding and preserving them for He is the Most High, the Supreme (in glory)" (*al-Baqarah* 255). The greatest verse of the Quran is all about Allah, His attributes and His greatness. This is a clear sign that Allah is, if one may use this term, "revealing" Himself to His creatures through the verses of this Quran. This aspect of the Quran is one of the most important, or the most important, aspects.

Similarly, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said about *soorah al-Ikhlaas*,

وَالَّذِي نَفْسِي بِيَدِهِ إِنَّهَا لَتَعْدِلُ ثُلُثَ الْقُرْآنِ

"By the One in whose hand is my soul, it is equal to one-third of the Quran."[1] *Soorah al-Ikhlaas* is the following *soorah*:

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ

"Say: He is Allah, (the) One, Allah, the Self-Sufficient Master. He neither begets, nor was He born. And there is none like unto Him" (*al-Ikhlaas* 1-4).[2] Once again, this *soorah* which the Prophet (peace be upon him) declared to be

[1] Recorded by al-Bukhari.

[2] This hadith has been explained by some in the following fashion: The verses of the Quran may be divided into three categories: those related to the stories of the prophets and earlier peoples, those related to law and rulings and those related to the attributes of Allah. Hence, *soorah al-Ikhlaas* covers the last third. Allah knows best. See Yahya al-Nawawi, *Sharh Saheeh Muslim* (Riyadh: Daar al-Muayyad, 1995), vol. 6, p. 335.

equivalent to one-third of the Quran is all about Allah, His names and attributes and His uniqueness.

There can be no doubt then that one of the major purposes of the Quran is to teach the creation about Allah. This should be something clear in the mind of the reader. He should turn to the Quran to learn about His creator. He should be emphasizing the relevant verses during his reading. When Allah mentions His names and attributes, the reader should be alert and realize that this is one of the main goals of the Quran and it is information about his creator that he will not be able to receive from any other source.

These teachings about Allah's names and attributes are essential for the strength and health of one's faith. It is by these verses of the Quran that one really knows whom he is worshipping and he then no longer worships something of theory alone without any aspect of realness to him. This point was aptly summarized by Muhammad Qutb when he wrote,

> You will not be able to fulfill the true form of worship and servitude nor attain the proper direction [in your worship] if you do not know the one who you are worshipping and directing your worship toward— that is, if you do not know the attributes that He has. [You will not be able to fulfill the true worship] until your worship is based on recognition and knowledge. And Allah has described Himself in His noble book with attributes that He wants us to know and attribute Him with [so that our worship of Him can be proper and as complete as we can make it].[1]

Furthermore, as Ahmad Salaam noted, many of the people before the coming of the Prophet (peace be upon him) accepted the idea of Allah being the only Creator of the

1 Muhammad Qutb, *Rakaaiz al-Imaan* (Riyadh: Daar Ishbeeliyah, 1997), p. 105.

Universe. However, they associated partners with Allah in different forms of worship. Therefore, Islam came to purify this concept of Allah being the Lord or *Rabb* and gave it its proper understanding. By doing so, then they would worship Allah alone properly. But the way to achieve that, or the beginning point, is to have the knowledge and correct understanding of Allah's names and attributes. If one has knowledge and a correct understanding of Allah's names and attributes, then one would never turn to anyone else or direct any form of worship to anyone other than Allah. Hence, a correct and detailed understanding of Allah's names and attributes is truly the foundation for the correct application of the proper belief in Allah.[1]

Hence, the desired product of these verses of the Quran is a true and devoted worship of Allah alone. The more that one knows about Allah and His attributes, the more one will love Allah, fear Allah and have hope in Allah. Definitely, the more one knows about Allah, the more one should love Allah and desire to please Allah and have Allah pleased with him. Hence, the correct understanding of the names and attributes of Allah is very important and very beneficial and forms one of the major goals of the teachings of the Quran.

Showing the Creation the Path and Way of Life That Is Pleasing to Allah

After one truly knows Allah by His names, attributes and actions, one should dearly want to know what actions he must perform to please Allah and what actions not to perform

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1 Ahmad Salaam, *Muqaddimah fi Fiqh Usool al-Dawah* (Beirut: Daar ibn Hazm, 1990), p. 97.

in order to avoid His displeasure. In every *rakah* of every prayer, the believer must earnestly pray,

اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلا الضَّالِّينَ

"Guide us to the straight path, the path of those You have blessed, not the path of those who have earned your anger nor of those who have gone astray" (*al-Faatihah* 6-7). Allah, in His mercy, did not leave humans without giving them the answer to this prayer. Allah seems to be alluding to the answer of this prayer by the opening verses of *soorah al-Baqarah*, the first *soorah* after *al-Faatiha*,

ذَلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لا رَيْبَ فِيهِ هُدًى لِلْمُتَّقِينَ

"This is the Book concerning which there is no doubt. A guidance for the God-fearing" (*al-Baqarah* 2). The Quran is the guide and the only true guide to the path that is pleasing to Allah:

إن هذا القرآن يهدي للتي هي أقوم

"Verily this Quran guides to that which is most right" (*al-Israa* 9).

The Quran is a guide for every aspect of one's life.[1] This is one of the greatest blessings that Allah has vouchsafed upon His creation: a clear guide for all aspects of life. The person who reads it realizing this important aspect and goal of the Quran needs never be lost. In every aspect of his life, he can find some guidance from Allah. He will always see and know what actions or path will be pleasing to Allah. The person who turns to the Quran in this matter will rarely, if ever, feel lost, confused or confounded. Allah says,

[1]As noted earlier, since the Quran points to the obligation of following the sunnah, the detailed guidance found in the sunnah must be considered part of the Quran's guidance.

قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ نُورٌ وَكِتَابٌ مُبِينٌ يَهْدِي بِهِ اللَّهُ مَنِ اتَّبَعَ رِضْوَانَهُ سُبُلَ السَّلَامِ وَيُخْرِجُهُمْ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَيَهْدِيهِمْ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ

"There has come from Allah a Light and a perspicuous Book wherewith Allah guides all who seek His good pleasure to ways of peace and safety, and leads them out of darkness, by His will, unto the light guides them to a path that is straight" (*al-Maaidah* 15-16).

Among the most important aspects that the Quran guides a person to is the proper behavior, manners and character that he should possess. When talking about the purpose for which he had been sent, the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) stated,

إِنَّمَا بُعِثْتُ لأُتَمِّمَ صَالِحَ الأَخْلاق

"I have been sent for the purpose of perfecting good morals."[1] A Muslim's life and his behavior should be an actualization and implementation of the Quran and sunnah. This is exactly what the true example and model, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), was like. When Aishah, the Prophet's wife (may Allah be pleased with her), was asked about the character of the Prophet (peace be upon him), she answered,

كَانَ خُلُقُهُ القُرآن

"His character was the Quran."[2]

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[1]Recorded by al-Haakim and others. Graded *sahih* by al-Albaani in *Saheeh al-Jaami*, vol. 1, p. 464,
[2] Recorded by Muslim.

Every individual should look to the Quran as the judge or signpost of his own life. That is, as al-Hasan al-Basri stated, "If anyone desires to know what he is [or what is his standing] he should examine himself in the light of the Quran."[1] A person's true esteem or true worth can be judged in the light of the teachings of the Quran. Every individual should look to the Quran and see where he stands with respect to its guidance. If he is benefiting from the guidance of the Quran, he should thank Allah and ask Allah to increase his guidance and *imaan* (faith). If he is falling short, he should blame only his own self, determine to change himself and turn in repentance to Allah.

Finally, it must be stressed that since the revelation of the Quran, scholars throughout the ages have been able to turn to the Quran, ponder its meanings, and, thereby, get guidance for the particular situation that they were living in. The Quran will always be filled with such guidance until the Day of Judgment. No matter how much the society and environment may change, the guidance found in the Quran will always be able to guide Muslims to the straight path. It is the word of Allah, the One who knows everything that will occur until the Day of Judgment and who can guide mankind under all circumstances. But this will only come about if the Muslims themselves turn to the Quran, realizing this aspect of the Quran, drinking from its fountain of guidance, and conveying its sublime teachings for every age to the masses.[2]

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[1]Quoted in al-Ajuri, p. 41.

[2]Not everyone has the ability to translate the Quran's teachings and guidance to events that are occurring today. This application of the Quranic teachings to today's reality needs to be done according to basic principles and methodology. One must also be aware of what is happening in the world at present and this requires some specific sources and methodology.

Creating the Complete and Balanced Islamic Individual

The Quran is not simply a book of laws— of dos and don'ts— but it is foremost a book of *tarbiyyah* or a book that develops and allows people to grow spiritually and morally. In the following verse, Allah describes the Quran as a *mauidhah*,

هَذَا بَيَانٌ لِلنَّاسِ وَهُدًى وَمَوْعِظَةٌ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ

"Here is a plain statement to men, a guidance and admonition (*mauidhah*) to those who fear Allah" (*ali-Imraan* 138). Lane gives the following definition for the word *mauidhah*,

> He exhorted him, admonished him, or warned him; he put him in fear; he exhorted him to obedience; commanded him to obey; he gave him good advice, or counsel; and reminded him of the results of affairs; he reminded him by informing him of that which should make the heart tender; he reminded him of that which should soften his heart by the mention of reward and punishment.[1]

So, *mauidhah* involves warning the person about the consequences of his actions. It includes reminding him of what his wrong actions will lead him to. It also includes, as the English expression states, "putting the fear of God in him" as well as making his heart soft and submissive to the truth.

Hence, the Quran is a book that is meant to reform the individual, either changing him if he were void of guidance or improving him if he already was walking along its straight path. It brings him from the death of *jaahiliya*

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1 E. W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (Cambridge, England: The Islamic Texts Society, 1984), vol. 2, p. 2953.

(ignorance) to the life of Islam— such that in his heart and mind he sees things in the light of Allah's guidance and he acts accordingly. As stated in the chapter describing what the Quran is, this is the true life of a human, a life which is different from that of one in ignorance just as life is different from death. Allah says in the Quran,

أومن كان ميتا فأحييناه وجعلنا له نورا يمشي به في الناس كمن مثله في الظلمات ليس بخارج منها

"Can he who was dead to whom We gave life, and a light whereby he can walk among men, be like him who is in the depths of darkness, from which he can never come out?" (*al-Anaam* 122). And,

وما يستوي الأعمى والبصير ولا الظلمات ولا النور ولا الظل ولا الحرور وما يستوي الأحياء ولا الأموات

"The blind and the seeing are not alike, nor are the depths of darkness and the light, nor are the chilly shade and the (genial) heat of the sun: Nor are alike those that are living and those that are dead" (*Faatir* 19-22). Also,

إن هو إلا ذكر وقرآن مبين لينذر من كان حيا ويحق القول على الكافرين

"This is no less than a message and a Quran making things clear: that it may give admonition to any (who are) alive, and that the word may be proved true against those who reject (truth)" (*Ya Seen* 69-70).

The difference between this goal of the Quran and the previously discussed goal is that the latter is referring basically to showing the straight path— like telling a person the laws of driving— while this goal is another aspect of the Quran which develops the person in such a way that he

follows the straight path that he finds from the previous goal— such as imbibing the citizen with his civic responsibility so that he abides by the driving laws even if he has no fear of being punished.[1]

In other words, the Quran is not just giving the human the knowledge (*ilm*) of what is correct but is also imbibing him with the feeling of fear, love and responsibility to Allah (*taqwa*) that will drive him to do what is proper and correct. This is achieved through many means in the Quran. For example, Allah tells humans the real nature of this world and its pleasures.[2] The Quran also contrasts the fleeting pleasures of this world with the real pleasure of Allah's rewards.[3] The Quran also vividly describes to mankind what will happen on the Day of Judgement to both those who were pious and those who were evil.

In fact, after almost every law stated in the Quran, Allah closes the relevant verses with the remembrance of Allah, promises of reward for those who stay within His

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[1]Note that there is a strong relationship between the implementation of this goal and the first goal discussed above. This is acceptable as these goals need not be mutually independent. There should be some overlap as the goals are all strongly related to one another, as shall be highlighted at the end of the chapter.

[2]There are many verses concerning this topic, such as the following: "The life of this world is but play and amusement. And if you believe and guard against evil, He will grant you your recompense and will not ask you to give up your possessions" (*Muhammad* 36); "Know you all that the life of this world is but play and a pastime, adornment and mutual boasting and multiplying, (in rivalry) among yourselves, riches, and children" (*al-Hadeed* 20).

[3]For example, Allah says, "Fair in the eyes of men is the love of things they covet: women and sons, heaped-up hoards of gold and silver, horses branded (for blood and excellence), and (wealth of) cattle and well-tilled land. Such are the possessions of this world's life. But with Allah is the best of the goals (to return to). Say: Shall I give you glad tidings of things far better than those? For the righteous are Gardens in nearness to their Lord with rivers flowing therein; therein is their eternal home with spouses purified and the good pleasure of Allah" (*ali-Imraan* 14-15).

limits and promises of punishment for those who wish not to abide by His commands. These are just some examples of how the Quran gives both *ilm* and *taqwa* to the individual.[1]

A clear example from the Quran of Allah both showing the Muslims the straight path or correct actions as well as inspiring them with *taqwa* or urging them to follow Allah's guidance can be seen in *soorah al-Baqarah*. Verses 221-242 of that *soorah* cover twelve different laws or rulings involving marriage, marital relations, divorce, waiting period, maintenance, nursing and so on. In the verses, every ruling is clearly tied to an aspect of belief or *aqeedah*. The first ruling concerns marriage with polytheists and ends with the words,

أولئك يدعون إلى النار والله يدعو إلى الجنة والمغفرة

بإذنه ويبين آياته للناس لعلهم يتذكرون

[1]For an excellent discussion of the beauty and effectiveness of the Quranic approach, see Muhammad Qutb, *Diraasat Quraaniyyah,* passim. One can see from Sayyid Qutb's, Muhammad's brother, comments that the style of the Quran lends itself to this giving of both *taqwa* and *ilm* through the following means: (1) The Quran presents what actually happens as if the person is witnessing the event itself by exposing all of the important and relevant aspects in a clear, vivid manner; (2) The Quran does not discuss essentially related matters in separate chapters like what one finds in science or philosophy books but everything is tied together and presented as one unified, related whole; (3) at the same time, though, the Quran stresses various aspects of life in balance or proper proportion, the proportions they deserve to be given in Allah's sight; and (4) the Quran gives reality a life or breathing spirit that allows the Quran to influence the reader. See Sayyid Qutb, *Fi Dhilaal al-Quran*, vol. 3, pp. 1788-1790. Of course, since the Quran is the speech of Allah, the Creator and Lord of mankind, His message is able to strike the hearts, intellect and emotions of mankind like no humanly produced work could. In fact, the way the Quran is able to affect mankind directly in the heart and soul is another proof that its source is Allah.

"They [the disbelievers] do but beckon you to the Fire. But Allah beckons by His Grace to the Garden and forgiveness. And makes His signs clear to mankind that they may receive admonition" (*al-Baqarah* 221). The second ruling prohibits intercourse with a menstruating wife and ends by saying,

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ التَّوَّابِينَ وَيُحِبُّ الْمُتَطَهِّرِينَ

"For Allah loves those who turn to Him constantly and He loves those who keep themselves pure and clean" (*al-Baqarah* 222) and,

وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّكُمْ مُلاقُوهُ وَبَشِّرْ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

"And fear Allah and know that you are to meet Him (in the Hereafter), and give good tidings to those who believe" (*al-Baqarah* 223). The next ruling concerns oaths and ends with,

وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

"For Allah is One who hears and knows all things" (*al-Baqarah* 224)

وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ حَلِيمٌ

and, "And He is oft-forgiving, most forbearing" (*al-Baqarah* 225). This is followed by a ruling concerning *al-eela*[1] and ends with,

فَإِنْ فَاءُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

"If they then return, Allah is oft-forgiving, most merciful" (*al-Baqarah* 226). The next verse ends with,

فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

"Allah hears and knows all things" (*al-Baqarah* 227). The fifth law concerns the waiting period and states,

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[1]This is an oath that a man makes vowing to abstain from his wives.

وَلا يَحِلُّ لَهُنَّ أَنْ يَكْتُمْنَ مَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ فِي أَرْحَامِهِنَّ إِنْ كُنَّ يُؤْمِنَّ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الآخِرِ

"And it is not lawful for them to hide what Allah has created in their wombs, if they have faith in Allah and the Last Day" (*al-Baqarah* 228).

The next verse discusses the number of divorces and concludes in this manner,

تِلْكَ حُدُودُ اللَّهِ فَلا تَعْتَدُوهَا وَمَنْ يَتَعَدَّ حُدُودَ اللَّهِ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ

"These are the limits ordained by Allah; so do not transgress them, if any do transgress the limits ordained by Allah, such persons wrong (themselves as well as others)" (*al-Baqarah* 229). Next comes the order to remain with such wives properly or to let them free, which is followed by Allah's words,

وَلا تَتَّخِذُوا آيَاتِ اللَّهِ هُزُوًا وَاذْكُرُوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَمَا أَنزَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَالْحِكْمَةِ يَعِظُكُمْ بِهِ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

"Do not treat Allah's signs as a jest, but solemnly rehearse Allah's favors on you, and the fact that He sent down to you the Book and Wisdom for your instruction. And fear Allah and know that Allah is well acquainted with all things" (*al-Baqarah* 231).

The following ruling concerns the breastfeeding of children and is followed with the words,

وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ

"But fear Allah and know that Allah sees well what you do" (*al-Baqarah* 233). Then comes the ruling concerning the waiting period of the widow followed by the words,

وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ

"And Allah is well acquainted with what you do" (*al-Baqarah* 234).

Next comes a ruling about an indirect marriage proposal to a widow while she is still in her waiting period (*iddah*). This command is followed by Allah's warning,

وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا فِي أَنفُسِكُمْ فَاحْذَرُوهُ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ حَلِيمٌ

"And know that Allah knows what is in your hearts, and take heed of Him; and know that Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most forbearing" (*al-Baqarah* 235). A ruling concerning divorce, the following injunction, ends with,

وَلَا تَنسَوُا الْفَضْلَ بَيْنَكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ

"And do not forget liberality between yourselves, for Allah sees well all that you do" (*al-Baqarah* 237). At this point, there is a brief change in topic as the person is reminded of the importance of prayer, as some rulings concerning prayer are mentioned. Then the final ruling found in this set of verses discusses the maintenance of the divorced woman in these words,

وَلِلْمُطَلَّقَاتِ مَتَاعٌ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ حَقًّا عَلَى الْمُتَّقِينَ

"For divorced women is a suitable gift. This is a duty on the righteous" (*al-Baqarah* 241). All of these rulings are ended by Allah's words,

كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ

"Thus does Allah make clear His signs to you in order that you may understand" (*al-Baqarah* 242).

The importance of giving both *ilm* (knowledge) and *taqwa* (fear of Allah and God-consciousness) cannot be overemphasized. If a person simply has the knowledge of what is right without anything in his soul driving him to perform that right deed, all of that knowledge will be of no avail or benefit to him. This can clearly be seen in Western societies, for example. How many people in the West know very well the dangers and harmful effects of smoking, drinking, drugs and so on, but, at the same time, how many of these same people have the will and drive to refrain from these acts that they know are so harmful to them?[1]

On the other hand, a false sense of *taqwa* without *ilm* can also be very dangerous[2] as such a person may do something very displeasing to Allah while he should have known better, and this may lead to his destruction. Allah says,

قُلْ هَلْ نُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِالأَخْسَرِينَ أَعْمَالاً الَّذِينَ ضَلَّ سَعْيُهُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَهُمْ يَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّهُمْ يُحْسِنُونَ صُنْعًا

"Say: Shall we tell you of those who lose most in respect of their deeds? Those whose efforts have been wasted in this

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[1]A society in which people lose their moral conscience even though they have the knowledge of what is right or wrong is doomed to disaster. Sayyid Qutb commented, "This is what causes the failure of all of the systems that are not based on the control of the heart, which is God consciousness (*taqwa*). And all the theories and ideologies that man has made for man and that do not have any authority from Allah likewise fail." Sayyid Qutb, *Fi Dhilaal*, vol. 3, p 1384.

[2]Although in the long-run *ilm* without *taqwa* is much more dangerous. Perhaps the person of *taqwa* without *ilm* shall be forgiven in some cases because of his ignorance and good intentions while the one with *ilm* and no *taqwa* combines knowing that the act he is performing is wrong with bad intentions.

life, while they thought that they were acquiring good by their works" (*al-Kahf* 103-104). In fact, this was the way of the Christians who worshipped Allah not based on knowledge. Hence, Allah calls them, in particular, those who have gone astray.

By the grace of Allah, if the person realizes this goal of the Quran and sincerely tries to achieve it through his reading and study of the Quran, he will be given both *ilm* and *taqwa* and he will become a complete Muslim in his life. In every *rakah* of his prayer, he will be asking Allah to guide him away from being a person of *ilm* without *taqwa* or a person with a false type of *taqwa* that is not based on *ilm*. In every *rakah*, he recites,

اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلا الضَّالِّينَ

"Guide us to the straight path, the path of those whom You have blessed and [not the path of] those who have earned Your anger or those who have gone astray." The Prophet (peace be upon him) explained to whom the last two terms were referring when he said,

إِنَّ الْمَغْضُوبَ عَلَيْهِمُ الْيَهُودُ وَ الضَّالِّينَ النَّصَارَى

"Those who earned the wrath of Allah are the Jews and those who went astray are the Christians."[1]

1 Recorded by Ahmad. See the discussion of the different narrations from the Prophet (peace be upon him) and his Companions stating the same in al-Huwaini, footnotes to ibn Katheer, *Tafseer al-Quran al-Adheem*, vol. 1, pp. 501-504.

Bringing about an Islamic Society

Many writers, such as ibn Taimiyyah and the famous sociologist ibn Khaldoon, state that humans are social creatures. Regardless of the extent to which such statements may be correct or incorrect, it is clear from the Quran that every human being is part of a greater society and is not an island unto himself. Allah says in the Quran,

يَاأَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمْ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالاً كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَتَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالأَرْحَامَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا

"O mankind, fear your Guardian Lord, who created you from a single person, created, out of it, his mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women; Fear Allah, through whom you demand your mutual (rights), and be heedful of the wombs (that bore you), for Allah ever watches over you" (*al-Nisaa* 1).

In general, from birth, a human is a person's son or daughter, another's brother or sister and yet another's nephew or cousin. Furthermore, almost everyone has neighbors and many have spouses. The guidance of the Quran produces not only the Islamic individual with respect to his worship and character, but beyond that it also guides humans in their relationships to one another such that they create a society based on mutual understanding, rights and responsibilities all according to the guidance of the Creator, the All-Wise, the All-Knowing. This society works together as a whole and uses all of its resources in ways that are pleasing to Allah.

Allah has made it clear that one of the purposes for which He revealed the Quran is so it may be the law of the land and used to judge what is right and what is wrong. Allah says to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him),

إِنَّا أَنزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ لِتَحْكُمَ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ بِمَا أَرَاكَ اللَّهُ

"We have sent down to you the Book in truth, that you might judge between men as guided by Allah" (*al-Nisaa* 105).

This society will be unique, based on the clear guidance from Allah. It will have its own principles and values that it will do its best to propagate and uphold. It will be something distinct from the way of ignorance (*jaahiliyya*) or non-Godly societies that this world has seen and is witnessing. Allah indicates that there is only His true and perfect guidance or there is the way of ignorance and the way of the desires of mankind. Note this implication in the following two verses of the Quran,

وَأَنزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنْ الْكِتَابِ وَمُهَيْمِنًا عَلَيْهِ فَاحْكُمْ بَيْنَهُمْ بِمَا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ عَمَّا جَاءَكَ مِنْ الْحَقِّ

"To you We sent the Scripture in truth, confirming the Scripture that came before it, and guarding it in safety. So judge between them by what Allah has revealed, and follow not their vain desires, diverging from the Truth that has come to you" (*al-Maaidah* 48).

أَفَحُكْمَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ يَبْغُونَ وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ مِنْ اللَّهِ حُكْمًا لِقَوْمٍ يُوقِنُونَ

"Do they then seek after a judgment of (the Ways of) Ignorance? But who, for a people whose faith is assured, can give better judgment than Allah?" (*al-Maaidah* 50).

The sole *raison d'etre* of such a society will be to worship Allah and serve His cause. It will stand for truth and justice in every realm of life and throughout the world. For example, within the society itself, Allah tells the believers that they do not have the right to allow others to do evil or spread evil in their midst.[1] Allah says in the Quran,

كُنتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنْ الْمُنكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ

"You are the best nation raised for mankind: You enjoin what is right, eradicate what is evil and believe in Allah" (*ali-Imraan* 110) and,

لُعِنَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ عَلَى لِسَانِ دَاوُودَ وَعِيسَى ابْنِ مَرْيَمَ ذَلِكَ بِمَا عَصَوْا وَكَانُوا يَعْتَدُونَ كَانُوا لا يَتَنَاهَوْنَ عَنْ مُنكَرٍ فَعَلُوهُ لَبِئْسَ مَا كَانُوا يَفْعَلُونَ

"Curses were pronounced on those among the Children of Israel who rejected faith, by the tongue of David and of Jesus the son of Mary, because they disobeyed and persisted in excesses. Nor did they forbid one another the iniquities which they committed: evil indeed were the deeds which they did" (*al-Maaidah* 78-79).

This is one essential aspect of this Islamic society guided by the teachings of the Quran: its members work together to eradicate evil and promote good. They not only

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[1]As opposed to those societies which believe in freedom and that everyone should be allowed to do whatever they wish even if it might be somewhat harmful for the other members of society.

purify themselves (which is the third goal of the Quran mentioned above) but they do their best to purify everyone in their society as a whole.

But this proper Islamic society which the Quran can guide humans to not only spreads good and eradicates evil from within but it also feels the responsibility of spreading the word of Allah and the true submission to the one and only God to the rest of the world. This can be seen in the Quranic injunctions concerning, for example, jihad. For instance, Allah says,

وَقَاتِلُوهُمْ حَتَّى لا تَكُونَ فِتْنَةٌ وَيَكُونَ الدِّينُ كُلُّهُ لِلَّهِ

"And fight them on until there is no more persecution, and religion becomes Allah's in its entirety" (*al-Anfaal* 39).

Hence, when a person reads the Quran, he must realize that the Quran is showing him or guiding him to his rights and responsibilities as a member of his own society and even his responsibilities towards all of mankind. When the person reads the Quran in this light and attains this guidance from the Quran, his behavior and actions will change such that he becomes beneficial and helpful for his own society and the world as a whole: calling people to the way of Allah and helping to establish the Quranic commands in this world.

Guiding Muslims in Their Ongoing Struggle Against the Enemies of Islam

Allah says in the Quran,

يُرِيدُونَ لِيُطْفِئُوا نُورَ اللَّهِ بِأَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَاللَّهُ مُتِمُّ نُورِهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْكَافِرُونَ هُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُ بِالْهُدَى وَدِينِ الْحَقِّ لِيُظْهِرَهُ عَلَى الدِّينِ كُلِّهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْمُشْرِكُونَ

"Their intention is to extinguish Allah's light with their mouths: But Allah will complete His light, even though the unbelievers may detest it. It is He who has sent His messenger with guidance and the religion of truth that He may make it prevail over all religion. Even though the pagans may detest it" (*al-Saff* 8-9).

Allah has made this religion to be established in the earth. But there are many humans and jinn in this world who do not wish to bow down to the Creator and Lord. Not only that, there are many jinn and humans in this world who do not wish to see others bow down to Allah and live virtuous lives. Due to this, there will always be a struggle between truth and falsehood. Satan and his followers will never give up their fight against Islam and faith and the Muslims are ever obligated to struggle against them. Allah says,

وَقَاتِلُوهُمْ حَتَّى لا تَكُونَ فِتْنَةٌ وَيَكُونَ الدِّينُ كُلُّهُ لِلَّهِ فَإِنِ انتَهَوْا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ وَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ مَوْلاكُمْ نِعْمَ الْمَوْلَى وَنِعْمَ النَّصِيرُ

"And fight them on until there is no more persecution, and religion becomes Allah's in its entirety but if they cease, verily Allah does see all that they do. If they refuse, be sure that Allah is your protector the best to protect and the best to help" (*al-Anfaal* 39-40).

History demonstrates that as individuals embrace Islam, they are often opposed by the people closest to them, such as family and close friends. This was true in the case of

the Companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) in Makkah—long before the Islamic state was established—and it is also true for many people who embrace Islam today in non-Muslim societies. Hence, as individuals seeking to follow the way of life they find to be true, Muslims will be opposed.

Islam, as discussed earlier, is not a religion simply for the individual. Indeed, when it spreads, it is a kind of ideological revolution that seeks to root out all the aspects of *jaahiliyya* in society. This kind of change will most likely be met with some resistance by those known as "the powers that be." Their entire values and way of life may be threatened or changed under the guidance of Islam and those who were leisurely enjoying the old, false way of life may not be content with any change in their power or their ability to fulfill their desires. Indeed, they will not be satisfied. As Sayyid Qutb has noted,

> History tells us, however, that the *jahili* society always chooses to fight and not to make peace. It normally attacks the vanguard of Islam at its very inception, whether it be a few persons, or larger groups, or it may wait until this vanguard has become a well-established community. From Noah to Muhammad, peace be on them, without exception, this has been the response of *jahili* society to the call of Islam.[1]

Allah is well aware of what forces oppose Islam and Muslims. Allah says in the Quran,

وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِأَعْدَائِكُمْ وَكَفَى بِاللَّهِ وَلِيًّا وَكَفَى بِاللَّهِ نَصِيرًا

"And Allah has full knowledge of your enemies: Allah is enough for a protector. And Allah is enough for a helper" (*al-Nisaa* 45). In His mercy, Allah did not leave Muslims

[1]Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, p. 65.

without any guidance concerning this matter. Certainly one of the purposes of the Quran is to guide the Muslims in this encounter with their enemies— be they enemies to the individual himself or opponents of the Muslim *ummah* as a whole. It is for this reason that Allah clearly describes these enemies and all those criminals who oppose the message of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Allah says,

وَكَذَلِكَ نُفَصِّلُ الآيَاتِ وَلِتَسْتَبِينَ سَبِيلُ الْمُجْرِمِينَ

"Thus do We explain the signs in detail in order to make the ways of the sinners clear" (*al-Anaam* 55). Allah describes who they are, what their goals are, how they behave and how the Muslim may defend himself against them. This is something that the reader must realize when he intends to read the Quran: Allah is showing him how to make himself stronger and protect himself against his enemies. Allah is showing him the path that he should follow in the encounters he will have to face.

Perhaps the most obvious example of this category of teachings in the Quran deals with Satan. Allah describes the source of the conflict between Satan and humans. Allah states,

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَاكُمْ ثُمَّ صَوَّرْنَاكُمْ ثُمَّ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلاَّ إِبْلِيسَ لَمْ يَكُنْ مِنْ السَّاجِدِينَ قَالَ مَا مَنَعَكَ أَلاَّ تَسْجُدَ إِذْ أَمَرْتُكَ قَالَ أَنَا خَيْرٌ مِنْهُ خَلَقْتَنِي مِنْ نَارٍ وَخَلَقْتَهُ مِنْ طِينٍ قَالَ فَاهْبِطْ مِنْهَا فَمَا يَكُونُ لَكَ أَنْ تَتَكَبَّرَ فِيهَا فَاخْرُجْ إِنَّكَ مِنْ الصَّاغِرِينَ قَالَ أَنظِرْنِي إِلَى يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ قَالَ إِنَّكَ مِنْ الْمُنْظَرِينَ

"It is We who created you and gave you shape. Then We told the angels to prostrate to Adam, and they prostrated; but not so Iblis, he refused to be of those who prostrate. (Allah) said, 'What prevented you from prostrating when I commanded you?' He said, 'I am better than he: You did create me from fire and him from clay.' (Allah) said, 'Get down from it [Paradise]: it is not for you to be arrogant here; get out, for you are of the meanest (of creatures).' He said, 'Give me respite till the day they are raised up.' (Allah) said, 'Be you among those who have respite'" (*al-Araaf* 11-15).

Allah also discloses to the believers what Satan has in store for them:

قَالَ فَبِمَا أَغْوَيْتَنِي لَأَقْعُدَنَّ لَهُمْ صِرَاطَكَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ثُمَّ لَآتِيَنَّهُمْ مِنْ بَيْنِ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ وَعَنْ أَيْمَانِهِمْ وَعَنْ شَمَائِلِهِمْ وَلَا تَجِدُ أَكْثَرَهُمْ شَاكِرِينَ

"He (Satan) said, 'Because you have thrown me out, lo I will lie in wait for them on your straight way. Then I will assault them from before them and behind them, from their right and their left: nor will you find, in most of them, gratitude'" (*al-Araaf* 16-17).

The Quran also depicts the ways and means of the Satan; one such way is appearing as a sincere advisor and well-wisher, as was the way he approached Adam and Eve although Allah had warned them about Satan (as He warns Muslims about him in the Quran):

فَوَسْوَسَ لَهُمَا الشَّيْطَانُ لِيُبْدِيَ لَهُمَا مَا وُورِيَ عَنْهُمَا مِنْ سَوْآتِهِمَا وَقَالَ مَا نَهَاكُمَا رَبُّكُمَا عَنْ هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةِ إِلَّا أَنْ تَكُونَا مَلَكَيْنِ أَوْ تَكُونَا مِنَ الْخَالِدِينَ وَقَاسَمَهُمَا إِنِّي لَكُمَا

لَمِنْ النَّاصِحِينَ فَدَلاَّهُمَا بِغُرُورٍ فَلَمَّا ذَاقَا الشَّجَرَةَ بَدَتْ لَهُمَا سَوْآتُهُمَا وَطَفِقَا يَخْصِفَانِ عَلَيْهِمَا مِنْ وَرَقِ الْجَنَّةِ وَنَادَاهُمَا رَبُّهُمَا أَلَمْ أَنْهَكُمَا عَنْ تِلْكُمَا الشَّجَرَةِ وَأَقُلْ لَكُمَا إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لَكُمَا عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ

"Then Satan began to whisper suggestions to them, in order to reveal to them their shame that was hidden from them (before). He said, 'Your Lord only forbade you this tree lest you should become angels or such beings as live forever.' And he swore to them both that he was their sincere advisor. So by deceit he brought about their fall: when they tasted of the tree, their shameful parts became manifest to them, and they began to sew together the leaves of the garden over their bodies. And their Lord called to them, 'Did I not forbid you that tree, and tell you that Satan was an avowed enemy to you?'" (*al-Araaf* 20-22).

Finally, Allah guides the believer to what may protect him from Satan:

وَإِمَّا يَنزَغَنَّكَ مِنْ الشَّيْطَانِ نَزْغٌ فَاسْتَعِذْ بِاللَّهِ إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

"And if (at any time) an incitement to discord is made to you by Satan, seek refuge in Allah. He is the one who hears and knows all things" (*Fussilat* 36).[1]

All of this is a mercy from Allah and, based on Allah's wisdom, it is part of the Quran. The reader of the

[1]Perhaps the best work describing and collecting together the above information concerning Satan is Umar al-Ashqar, *The World of the Jinn and Devils.*

Quran must realize that Allah is warning him against this great enemy.

But this is not the only enemy that Allah clearly describes or talks about in the Quran. Allah also discusses the disbelievers, be they polytheists, Jews or Christians, and how they plot against Muslims. Allah warns Muslims about taking them as close friends and allies. The hypocrites are also minutely described in the Quran. This is because, and Allah knows best, they are a great danger to the social fabric and unity of the Muslim *ummah*. They are an enemy from *within that many Muslims may not recognize and that other Muslims may not have the courage to recognize. Hence,* Allah has devoted long passages of the Quran to their ways and, in fact, one *soorah* even bears their name.[1]

Allah also cautions the believer concerning his own soul (*al-nafs*)— an enemy concerning which most humans would have been oblivious if it were not for the revelation of Allah and His guidance. In two places in the Quran, Allah states,

وَمَنْ يُوقَ شُحَّ نَفْسِهِ فَأُوْلَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

"And those saved from the covetousness of their own souls they are the ones that achieve prosperity" (*al-Hashr* 9; *al-Taghaabun* 16). Allah is telling the believer that if he is not cautious concerning what his own soul sometimes desires or leads himself to, he can easily take himself to his own destruction.

When the reader opens the Quran, he should be aware that Allah is telling him and warning him about his true enemies. When reading about Satan, disbelievers, hypocrites and others, an alarm should sound in his mind telling him that Allah is now describing those beings that are

[1]For a good discussion of the Quranic view of hypocrites see Abdul Azeez al-Hameedi, *Al-Munafiqoon fi al-Quran al-Kareem* (Jeddah: Daar al-Mujtama, 1989).

going to try to deviate him from the straight path. He should take note of how they behave and what he can do to defend himself and the Muslim society from them.

In Reality: The Quran Is All about the Proper Conception and Application of *Tauheed*

Although in the above, different categories or "goals" were discussed, in reality all of those goals, and hence all of the Quran, emanate from one goal: the true, complete and proper conception and application of belief in the oneness of God. The correct belief in *tauheed* (Islamic monotheism) does not mean that one simply recognizes that there is a God or creator. It goes beyond that to having the proper beliefs about that creator and submitting to that creator and god in all realms of life, either as an individual in his worship and behavior or as a society.

The commentator of *al-Aqeedah al-Tahaawiyya* also noted that all of the Quran is actually a discussion of *tauheed*:

> Most of the *soorahs* in the Quran are concerned with the two types of *tauheed*[1]; in fact, every *soorah* in the Quran [is concerned with *tauheed*]. The Quran either reports about Allah's names and attributes. This is the *tauheed* that one must have knowledge about and that is reported. Or the Quran calls to His worship, associating no partner with Him [in that worship] and abandoning any other idol other than Him. This is the *tauheed* of intention and will. Or the Quran orders, prohibits or commands [His] obedience. These are essential

1 What is meant by the "two types of *tauheed*" is *tauheed* with respect to (1) what one believes in and acknowledges as true and (2) one's devotions and worship in his life.

aspects of *tauheed* and part of its completeness. Or the Quran reports about how [Allah] honors the people [who adhere to] *tauheed* and what He does for them in this world and what He graciously bestows on them in the Hereafter. That is the reward for [adhering to] *tauheed*. Or [the Quran] reports about the polytheists and how He treats them in this world and what kind of punishment they will receive in the end. That is the punishment for those who abandon the aspects of *tauheed*.[1]

Sayyid Qutb echoed that statement when he wrote,

Defining the real *uloohiyyah*[2] and clarifying its particular aspects of Lordship, Sustainer and Ruler, and defining *uboodiyyah*[3] and its limits that must not be trespassed, and going from all of that to mankind worshipping their true Lord, and recognizing that Lordship, Sustaining and Ruling belong only to Him..[4] this is the main topic of the entire Quran.. And what is beyond that is simply an explanation of what this great truth [of *tauheed*] implies and requires in the life of humans, in every aspect.[5]

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[1]Sadr al-Deen Abu al-Izz al-Hanafi, *Sharh al-Tahaawiyya fi al-Aqeeda al-Salafiyyah* (Fairfax, VA: Institute of Islamic and Arabic Sciences in America, forthcoming), p. 35.

[2]*Uloohiyyah* is an aspect of *tauheed* which implies that no one has the right to be worshipped except Allah.

[3]The correct servitude to Allah.

[4]Two periods instead of three have been placed in this quote because actually nothing has been omitted from the text but this was Sayyid Qutb's style to put such periods leading to his next point.

[5]Sayyid Qutb, *Fi Dhilaal al-Quran* (Beirut: Daar al-Shurooq, 1977), vol. 3, p. 1753.

Summary

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, when a reader has a clear concept of what it is he is trying to get from what he is reading, the more he will be able to concentrate on those important points in his reading. Similarly, when a person reads the Quran, he should know what it is that he should get from the Quran. He should realize that the Quran is showing him what to believe in. It is showing him how to act such that he will be pleasing Allah and worshipping Him in the proper manner. He should turn to the Quran to try to understand what are Allah's rights upon him and how can he fulfill those rights. He should turn to the Quran to see how he supposed to behave toward His lord. He also must turn to the Quran to see how he is supposed to deal with others in a way that would be most pleasing to Allah. He also turns to the Quran to understand how to protect himself from all of those forces that are trying to distance him from Allah. All of these teachings should be foremost in the reader's mind. When they are, Allah willing, the guidance of Allah's speech will become clear to him and he will truly benefit from the Quran in both this life and the Hereafter.

Chapter 6
The Way to Approach the Quran

The previous chapter discussed the major goals of the Quran. The reader should have a good grasp of these goals even before he begins his reading of the Quran. He should realize what the Quran is about and what Allah is conveying to him through it. As noted earlier, this will affect how he reads the Quran and how much he benefits from the Quran. Knowledge of its major goals will throw new light on many verses of the Quran that the reader may have, in the past, read over quickly without comprehending what it was the Quran was conveying to him.

There are some other aspects, what may be called "ways of approaching the Quran," that will also benefit the reader. If these aspects are present in the heart and mind of the reader, the Book will have a much greater effect on him. He will be moved by the Quran in a way similar to Allah's description of how the Quran affects the believers,

اللَّهُ نَزَّلَ أَحْسَنَ الْحَدِيثِ كِتَابًا مُتَشَابِهًا مَثَانِيَ تَقْشَعِرُّ مِنْهُ جُلُودُ الَّذِينَ يَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُمْ ثُمَّ تَلِينُ جُلُودُهُمْ وَقُلُوبُهُمْ إِلَى ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ

"Allah has revealed the most beautiful message in the form of a book, consistent with itself, (yet) repeating (its teaching in various aspects): The skins of those who fear their Lord tremble because of it; then their skins and their hearts do soften to the remembrance of Allah" (*al-Zumar* 23). These are, in fact, the ways that the Companions of the Prophet

(peace be upon him), those described in the verse just quoted, approached the Quran.

Allowing the Quran to State What Is True and What Is False

There is no question that the Quran guides to the straight path and to truth. This is one of its major goals. Yet, at the same time, although this guidance is perfect and preserved, it must be allowed to guide the reader. The Quran must be given the opportunity to tell its reader what the straight path is. That is, the reader must approach the Quran with, if one may use this expression, an "open mind." If the reader has already decided what is right and what is wrong, and is only looking to the Quran to substantiate his views, then the Quran will never give him the guidance it contains. Indeed, in that case, the Quran would never be given that opportunity.

Unfortunately, it is the case with some readers of the Quran who, instead of letting the Quran speak for itself, have taken it upon themselves to speak for the Quran. If it contains any passage that contradicts their preconceived notions of what is the truth, instead of accepting what the Quran says, they simply try to reinterpret the Quran in such a way that it is consistent with their beliefs and ideas. They do not realize that it is their thinking and beliefs that need to be changed or corrected according to the Quran and not vice-versa. Allah, who revealed the Quran, is not in need of their far-fetched interpretations. It[1] presents the truth in clear and plain language and it is simply up to the reader to accept what Allah has said in the Quran.

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[1]With the sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), of course.

In the history of Islam, one can see that the lack of allowing the Quran to state what is true and what is false has been a major characteristic of the heretical and stray groups (*ahl al-bida*).[1] They approached the Quran with preconceived notions and tried to force their opinions on the Quran.[2] Without a doubt, it can be stated that they did not turn to the Quran for its guidance— since they had already decided what the truth is. They turned to it only trying to substantiate their views. A glaring example of this nature is the Mutazila who even attempted to change the wording of the Quran because it was inconsistent with their preconceived beliefs. The Mutazila, due to the supposedly "ingenious" theories they developed, did not believe in Allah's attribute of speech. They have a lengthy theory and proof that such an attribute is impossible for God according to their notion of God.[3] Hence, they were forced to try to change the wording of the Quran. They attempted to change the verse that states,

وَكَلَّمَ اللَّهُ مُوسَىٰ تَكْلِيمًا

"And to Moses Allah spoke directly"[4] (*al-Nisaa* 164) to "And Moses spoke to Allah directly."[5]

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[1]In fact, it is a necessary characteristic of the people of innovations and desires. By definition, their teachings go against the Quran and their only solution is to try to reinterpret the Quran in ways that are consistent with their heresies.

[2]They were forced to do this because all Muslims believe in the Quran and, to propagate their beliefs, they had to claim that their beliefs were consistent with the Quran.

[3]Their notion of God was based on rational arguments and not on the Quran and sunnah.

[4]In Arabic, *Wa kallama Allahu Musa takleema.*

[5]In Arabic, *Wa kallama Allaha Musa takleema*. See Fahd al-Roomi, *Manhaj al-Madrasat al-Aqliyyah al-Hadeetha fi al-Tafseer* (Muassasat al-Risaalah, 1983), vol. 1, p. 57.

Quran out of context or ignore other related verses that give a complete picture of the Quranic view of the topic at hand. When this is done, the Quran can be used to "prove" things that are incorrect.

Here are some examples: If someone wants to prove that it is obligatory to obey and be loyal to the government no matter how much the government may be non-Islamic he may only quote the verse,

يَاأَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُوْلِي الأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ

"O you who believe, obey Allah and obey the Messenger, and those charged with authority among you" (*al-Nisaa* 59) and ignore all of the other relevant verses— even the remainder of that verse itself which reads "If you dispute over any matter, refer it to Allah and to the Messenger"— and hadith on the same question. In a relevant hadith, the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) stated,

السَّمْعُ وَالطَّاعَةُ حَقٌّ مَا لَمْ يُؤْمَرْ بِالْمَعْصِيَةِ فَإِذَا أُمِرَ بِمَعْصِيَةٍ فَلا سَمْعَ وَلا طَاعَةَ

"Listening and obeying is a duty as long as one is not ordered to do an act of disobedience [to Allah]. If one is ordered to do an act of disobedience, there is then not to be any listening or obeying."[1]

Similarly, if someone wants to prove that it is permissible to takes Christians as *auliyaa* (close friends and

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[1] Recorded by al-Bukhari; Muslim has something similar.

allies)[1], he will only quote the following verse, ignoring the numerous other verses that are pertinent,

لَتَجِدَنَّ أَشَدَّ النَّاسِ عَدَاوَةً لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الْيَهُودَ وَالَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا وَلَتَجِدَنَّ أَقْرَبَهُمْ مَوَدَّةً لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّا نَصَارَى ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّ مِنْهُمْ قِسِّيسِينَ وَرُهْبَانًا وَأَنَّهُمْ لا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ

"And nearest among them in love to the believers will you find those who say, 'We are Christians,' because among them are men devoted to learning. And men who have renounced the world and they are not arrogant" (*al-Maaidah* 82).[2] Such a person will ignore verses like the following,

وَلَنْ تَرْضَى عَنْكَ الْيَهُودُ وَلا النَّصَارَى حَتَّى تَتَّبِعَ مِلَّتَهُمْ

"Never will the Jews or the Christians be satisfied with thee unless you follow their form of religion" (*ali-Imraan* 120); and,

يَاأَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لا تَتَّخِذُوا الْكَافِرِينَ أَوْلِيَاءَ مِنْ دُونِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَتُرِيدُونَ أَنْ تَجْعَلُوا لِلَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ سُلْطَانًا مُبِينًا

"O you who believe! Take not for close friends unbelievers rather than believers. Do you wish to offer Allah an open proof against yourselves?" (*al-Nisaa* 144).

This problem of approaching the Quran with one's preconceived notions of right and wrong may even be growing worse in this age of modern science and

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[1]This argument has been made quite often recently, especially among the Muslims in the West who, in general, live with the Christians and Jews. The argument has also been heard quite often in some parts of the Muslim world, especially after the Gulf War.

[2]For more examples of this nature, see al-Khaalidi, *Mafaateeh*, pp. 90-91.

advancements in knowledge. Some Muslims nowadays spend years of specialized study to get, for example, an advanced degree. They master a particular topic. Unfortunately, sometimes this leads them to believe that they completely understand the reality and essence of the field they studied and to start to analyze the Quran in their light of their "confirmed knowledge."[1] It is easy for such a person to forget Allah's words,

وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنْ الْعِلْمِ إِلاَّ قَلِيلاً

"Of knowledge it is only a little that is communicated to you (O mankind)" (*al-Israa* 85) and to approach the Quran in an improper fashion. Those verses that go against what the person thinks he knows must either be ignored, given a new reinterpretation based on their knowledge or, and this is the worse case, rejected as false in light of today's modern science.[2]

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[1]This is especially a problem with respect to social sciences that are almost entirely based on Western philosophies and views of life.

[2] This approach of critiquing the revelation based on one's "scientific knowledge" has been especially dangerous with respect to the hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him). With respect to the Quran, no Muslim would dare reject a verse if he finds it inconsistent with what he believers to be "scientific fact"; in that case, the most he will do is try to reinterpret the verse to make it consistent with his "facts." However, with respect to hadith, people have, in a very bold fashion, declared authentic hadith to be fabricated simply because the hadith did not match their view of reality. Such criticism of hadith has even gone beyond those hadith that are related to science to hadith whose correctness mankind could not possibly judge based on their limited experiences. The most prominent example that comes to this author's mind is the hadith from *Sahih al-Bukhari* in which the Prophet (peace be upon him) stated that a people would not prosper or have *falaah* if their affairs were in the hands of women. Some contemporary speakers have rejected that hadith on the basis of the examples of Golda Meier, Margaret Thatcher and Indira Gandhi. This approach is preposterous because there is no scientific measure of *falaah* by which one can say that the peoples of those female leaders had *falaah* and, therefore, the hadith must not be true.

If a person approaches the Quran in this manner, he will never see its real guidance. He will continue in his obstinate behavior and wandering ways no matter how often he reads the Quran— unless Allah has mercy upon him and guides him to the proper way of approaching the Quran. Until he changes his approach to the Quran, his heart, mind and soul will be closed to its true guidance.

One has to turn to the Quran realizing that it is the guidance from Allah, the All-Wise, the All-Knowing and it is the *Furqaan* (criterion of right and wrong) showing the person the difference between right and wrong.[1] Again, this was the way of the unique generation of the Companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Al-Khaalidi writes,

> This is what the noble Companions did in their behavior towards the Quran. They were a unique Quranic generation. Everyone of them would leave all of his old thoughts, perceptions and traditions on the doorstep of the Quran; then he would enter the broad and pure world of the Quran with nothing in his hands [that is, no preconceptions] and then he would build himself in a balanced manner, stage by stage and he would derive his decisions, culture and way of life from the Quran, and he would leave its study as a person full of faith, balanced and straight.[2]

[1]The passage above is in reference to the person who has studied the teachings of the Quran or life of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) and is convinced that they are true. In other words, this is the case with the believer. Since he already knows and believes that the Quran is Allah's word, there is no room for him to question it or reinterpret it in the manner he wishes. With respect to the disbeliever or skeptic, the overriding question that he must answer is whether the Quran is a true and pure revelation from God. This can be convincingly argued in a logical fashion to the point that only an arrogant disbeliever would deny its true validity. However, such a discussion is beyond the scope of this present work.

[2]Al-Khaalidi, *Mafaateeh*, p. 89.

To put it into Western terms and to relate it directly to those who convert to Islam: Many times people enter into Islam with a lot of "old baggage." It is a must that a person make a complete break from the teachings of *jaahiliyyah* (ignorance) and discard all of that "old baggage." Otherwise, it may color his understanding and reading of the Quran. He may be reading the Quran or hadith and interpreting it in the light of that "old baggage" and, therefore, he never gets a chance to see the whole and complete picture that is being presented to him by Islam.

In many cases it is not obvious to the reader that he is not approaching the Quran in this correct manner. This is probably the saddest case. This may be particularly true for those who have grown up in contemporary Muslim societies that have had teachings alien to Islam penetrate their society and culture. A person from those societies may read the Quran in the light of what he believes are Islamic teachings while, in fact, they are not the teachings of Islam. In other words, his vision has been blurred by customs he practices and sees as Islamic but are not, by teachings he has received that he thinks are Islamic but are not and so on. Every time he comes across a verse related to these topics, he interprets it according to his incorrect notions. Unfortunately, he has never allowed himself a true study of the Quran that will show him the proper Islamic views of these same ideas that he thinks are correct. This person's intention may certainly be good but, unless Allah guides him to see the mistake of his notions, he will actually miss the true guidance of the Quran.

In sum, if one really wants to learn from the Quran, he must approach the Quran in such a way that he allows the Quran to speak for itself and tell him what is correct and what is false. All preconceived notions must be judged by what the Quran says and not vice-versa. If the Quran is not approached in this manner, one should not expect to benefit

from its teachings related to those matters concerning which the reader has already made his conclusions.

Realizing That Everything in the Quran Is True and Having a Complete Trust in It

Allah states,

وَمَنْ أَصْدَقُ مِنَ اللَّهِ حَدِيثًا

"And whose word can be truer than Allah's" (*al-Nisaa* 87 and *al-Nisaa* 122). When a Muslim reads the Quran he must realize that everything it states is true. No matter what the topic might be, what Allah says about it is the truth, regardless of whether it be something related to the Unseen, the Hereafter, history, natural law, social law or any other subject. It is all true, coming from the Lord of the Worlds, and no truth can possibly contradict it.

This is an important aspect because sometimes someone may read a passage in the Quran that seems to go against the reality around him. This might make the person question or doubt the Quran. But for the reader who realizes that nothing in reality can go against the Quran, this kind of event just opens his eyes. He realizes, for example, that the Quran is laying down some general law and there is some reason or some precondition that is not being met that is keeping that law from being implemented. This will make him study the principle of the Quranic verse in greater detail, in light of other verses and hadith, to see what it is exactly that Allah is describing. Or it will make him study what is happening in greater detail, going beyond the superficial level to find the true cause for the apparent— and only apparent— contradiction between what the Quran states and what is happening in front of him.

For example, some question why there are so many Muslims in this world yet the Muslims are in such a humbled and defeated state. They argue that, in the Quran, Allah promises to help the believers yet this help and victory from Allah does not seem to be coming about. This kind of argument can only come from someone who does not have complete confidence that everything that Allah says in the Quran is true or from someone who does not realize the intricacies of the principles stated in the Quran. There is no place in the Quran in which Allah states that He will help all who simply call themselves believers. Allah promises, instead, to test the believers, to have them demonstrate their faith and willingness to sacrifice for Allah's sake, before Allah grants them victory. Allah states, among many other similar verses, in *soorah al-Ankaboot*,

أَحَسِبَ النَّاسُ أَنْ يُتْرَكُوا أَنْ يَقُولُوا آمَنَّا وَهُمْ لا يُفْتَنُونَ وَلَقَدْ فَتَنَّا الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ فَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ الْكَاذِبِينَ

"Do men think that they will be left alone on saying, 'We believe' and that they will not be tested? We did test those before them and Allah will certainly know those who are true from those who are false" (*al-Ankaboot* 2-3).

Furthermore, there is the question of whom Allah promises to give victory and aid. Allah says,

يَاأَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنْ تَنصُرُوا اللَّهَ يَنصُرْكُمْ وَيُثَبِّتْ أَقْدَامَكُمْ

"O you who believe, if you will help (the cause of) Allah, He will help you and plant your feet firmly" (*Muhammad* 7). One may ask how many Muslims today are really striving for the sake of Allah and are, therefore, deserving of Allah's

support and victory. The answer to that question will demonstrate that Allah's promise of giving the believers victory is true yet the Muslims are not fulfilling the conditions needed to earn victory and succor from Allah.[1]

When the astute and alert reader of the Quran notices this apparent contradiction between reality and what the Quran says, he is led to study the Quran more deeply to understand what the Quran is really saying. Hence, he ends up with a more complete and stronger understanding of the Quran than the reader who doubts such passages or the one who does not even bother to notice such apparent contradictions.

Sometimes the apparent contradiction is because the reader does not realize the reality of what is happening around him. With respect to the situation of the Jews in Israel, one could argue that this seems to go against the clear teachings of the Quran found in the verse,

ضُرِبَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ الذِّلَّةُ أَيْنَ مَا ثُقِفُوا

"Shame is pitched over them [the Jews] (like a tent) wherever they are found" (*ali-Imraan* 112). Actually the rest of this verse explains why there could be exceptions to this law:

إِلاَّ بِحَبْلٍ مِنْ اللَّهِ وَحَبْلٍ مِنْ النَّاسِ

"Except when under a covenant (of protection) from Allah and from men" (*ali-Imraan 112*). This is exactly what is happening today. If it were not for the billions of dollars of

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[1]Then again there is also the question of what is the Quranic concept of who is victorious. For this point see Jamaal al-Din Zarabozo, "Who are the Victorious?" *al-Basheer* (Vol. 4, No. 6, March-April 1991), pp. 1-5. Reprinted in Jamaal al-Din Zarabozo, *The Friday Prayer: Part II-Khutbahs (I)* (Ann Arbor, MI: Islamic Assembly of North America, 1994), pp. 99-107.

aid that Israel receives from its allies in the West and others, Israel would, it seems clear, collapse.[1]

When the reader approaches the Quran in this manner— knowing that what it says is true and that reality must follow it— he has a completely different awareness and understanding of the Quran than the reader who does not give this concept much thought. The first reader not only knows that what the Quran says is true but he also realizes that what it states must be happening in the world around him. Hence, he understands what is happening around him and acts accordingly based on this deep understanding of the Quran.

In addition, al-Raawi notes that the believers must have confidence in themselves and in their religion in the sense that they believe that the remedy for any problem they face, modern or old, can be found in the guidance of Allah.[2] This attitude can be found in the Muslim who truly believes that everything the Quran says is true and any contradictory way of life is falsehood. In reality, some Muslims, especially in the past few centuries, have "given up" on the teachings of the Quran and have looked for alternative sources to find the best way to live in today's world. They still believe in the Quran at one level but they fail to believe in it completely, in the sense that everything it says is true and will always be true, no matter what changes occur in the world.

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1 For example, during the early 1990s, Israel received from the United States alone about $3 billion annually, not to speak of the assistance from numerous other Western countries. That means that Israel received from the United States approximately $1,395 yearly for each of its Jewish citizens. During that same time, Israel was suffering from a chronic foreign trade imbalance. Without such close ties and assistance from the United States and other guilt-ridden Western countries, the economy of Israel would have most likely faltered. Cf., "Israel (country)," *Microsoft® Encarta® 98 Encyclopedia.* © 1993-1997 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. For further insight into the meaning of verse 112 of *ali-Imraan*, see Daraaz, pp. 57-59.

2 Al-Raawi, p. 104.

Finally, it must be pointed out that this approach to the Quran is essential for a believer. He is not free to doubt any verse or teaching of the Quran because doubt or skepticism concerning any verse is tantamount to heresy and disbelief. It means that the person is not really certain that the Quran is from Allah; this is completely unacceptable. Either the person knows with certainty that the Quran is the truth from Allah, as is often stated in the Quran, or, in fact, he is not a true believer. Similarly, the person does not have the right to believe in what he likes of the Quran and disregard what he doubts or dislikes of the Quran. Allah says,

أَفَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِبَعْضِ الْكِتَابِ وَتَكْفُرُونَ بِبَعْضٍ فَمَا جَزَاءُ مَنْ يَفْعَلُ ذَلِكَ مِنْكُمْ إِلاَّ خِزْيٌ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ يُرَدُّونَ إِلَى أَشَدِّ الْعَذَابِ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ

"Then it is only a part of the Book that you believe and do you reject the rest? But what is the reward for those among you who have behaved like this but disgrace in this life? And on the Day of Judgment they shall be consigned to the most grievous chastisement for Allah is not unmindful of what you do" (*al-Baqarah* 85).

The believer must exert himself to see the truth of any Quranic passage if it is dealing with something he experiences and sees in this life. This will bring him closer to the Quran and increase his correct understanding and application of the Quran.

Releasing the Texts from the Constraints of Time and Place

The Quran was revealed at a certain time and in reference, in many cases, to a certain people or incident. It is sometimes easy for the reader to become complacent and to think of the Quran in terms of referring just to something that happened, something bygone. He thereby closes his eyes unconsciously to the fact that the Quran was not revealed only for a specific era or for a specific people. Instead it is the guidance for all of mankind until the Day of Judgment. It contains lessons that transcend the constraints of time and place. The reader must open his eyes and realize that the Quran, although it refers to specific events, is laying down lessons and principles that are valid for all times and places. Instead of thinking only about the event referred to, it is much more important for the reader to think about how the Quranic lesson is being manifested in front of his own eyes or is to be applied in his times.

This is not meant to downplay the importance of the science of *asbaab al-nuzool* (the study of the events leading up to a specific revelation). In many cases, the actual meaning or proper intent of a particular verse cannot be fully understood without looking to the verse's *asbaab al-nuzool*. But that does not mean that the verse itself or its ruling or lesson is restricted to only that occasion or only to those individuals to whom it was originally referring. If that were the case, then perhaps much of the Quran would have no validity today. This important point is why scholars agree upon the maxim: the ruling is determined by the generality of the text and not by the particularity of the occasion of the ruling.

That the text of the Quran was not to be confined by time and place was something well-known to the scholars of

tafseer throughout the ages. Whenever they turned to the Quran, they found guidance for their own place and time because they realized that the lessons and rulings of the Quran were not to be restricted to the time of the Companions of the Prophet. This was clearly reflected in their commentaries on the Quran. Al-Khaalidi notes,

> Each and every generation of Muslims found in the text of the Quran a discussion of what they were passing through and what would improve their lives as if the Quran was being revealed at that moment in particular. Every one of the commentators on the Quran started from the texts of the Quran to develop and train his people and make their situation better. And from every commentary on the Quran one can derive the level of culture and civilization, customs, social life, level of belief and behavior for the period in which the commentator lived. That commentary was a recording of the civilization and history of that period. That was only the case because the texts of the Quran were applicable to the time and place of the commentator and were directed to the people around him.[1]

When the reader approaches the Quran with this perception in his mind not thinking that this verse was talking about such and such Companion and that verse was referring to the disbelieving tribes and so on, but thinking that each and every verse is actually giving a meaning that is relevant to what is happening around him, then he will see the Quranic messages living in front of his own eyes. He will read verses, that were originally revealed in reference to specific people or incidents, and see them being reenacted around him in his life. Instead of thinking that the verses are talking about something that has passed, he will realize that

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[1]Al-Khaalidi, *Mafaateeh*, p. 106.

the Quran is referring to living and happening events, things that occur over and over in the history of mankind and that are occurring around him while he is reading the Quran, regardless of whether he be at the Kaaba, in Karachi or in New York.

For example, Allah says in the Quran,

وَمِنْ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَعْبُدُ اللَّهَ عَلَى حَرْفٍ فَإِنْ أَصَابَهُ خَيْرٌ اطْمَأَنَّ بِهِ وَإِنْ أَصَابَتْهُ فِتْنَةٌ انقَلَبَ عَلَى وَجْهِهِ خَسِرَ الدُّنْيَا وَالآخِرَةَ ذَلِكَ هُوَ الْخُسْرَانُ الْمُبِينُ

"There are among men some who serve Allah as if on an edge; if good befalls them, they are, therewith, well content; but if a trial comes to them, they turn on their faces; they lose both this life and the hereafter. That is indeed the manifest loss" (*al-Hajj* 11). A look at al-Tabari's commentary reveals that this verse was revealed concerning some of the bedouin tribes around Madinah who entered Islam and stayed with the Prophet (peace be upon him) in Madinah only if such a venture turned out good for them.[1] Obviously, if when reading this verse, the reader simply thinks in his mind about those bedouin tribes only, he will be missing the real guidance of the Quranic verse. Instead he should look around him and see how until this day such people still exist. He should take a warning from this verse and realize that the behavior described in this verse is not something that was exhibited by some people during the time of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) but it is a behavior that will be repeatedly appearing throughout the history of mankind. If the reader applies the Quran to the life around him, he will see this verse demonstrated in front of him. Even more importantly, because of his alertness, he might find that he

[1]Abu Jafar ibn Jareer al-Tabari, *Jaami al-Bayaan an Taweel Ayi Al-Quran* (Beirut: Daar al-Fikr, 1988), vol. 10, p. 123.

himself exhibits this kind of behavior. He might realize that the verse is actually talking about him. Because he approached the Quran in the correct manner, releasing its text from constraints of time and place, he will be able to notice his grave mistake and correct himself before it is too late.

This is in contrast to the person who reads the Quran thinking that those verses refer to bygone people and misses the relevance of the text to his own time. He does not realize that the Quran is describing what is happening around him or perhaps, most importantly, what he himself is doing.

In another verse, Allah states,

الَّذِينَ قَالَ لَهُمُ النَّاسُ إِنَّ النَّاسَ قَدْ جَمَعُوا لَكُمْ فَاخْشَوْهُمْ
فَزَادَهُمْ إِيمَانًا وَقَالُوا حَسْبُنَا اللَّهُ وَنِعْمَ الْوَكِيلُ

"Those to whom men said, 'A great army is gathering against you, so fear them,' but it only increased their faith. They said, 'For us Allah suffices, and He is the best guardian'" (*ali-Imraan* 173). One does not have to turn to any commentary on the Quran to realize that this verse was revealed concerning a specific people at a specific event. This is quite clear from the wording and context of the verse. Yet the lesson it contains is a very important one, especially for Muslims living in times like today when Muslims are very weak and the enemies of Islam are taking advantage of their economic and military superiority.

What a loss it would be for the reader to read this verse just thinking about it as a historical happening and not realizing what an example and lesson it contains for him. In this verse, Allah is making it clear that the true believers with a correct understanding of Islam know that the enemies of Islam will gather against them. When this occurs, they know that Allah's promise and plan for this world is true and this only increases their *imaan* and never increases their fear of the enemies of Allah. This was the case of those people

concerning which this verse was originally revealed and the reader should realize that this should be his response, since he claims to be a true believer, whenever he comes across a similar situation.

When the Quran is freed from constraints of time and place it really has a living and vital effect on the reader. When he closes the Quran upon the completion of his reading, his vision and sight are now at a new level. As he looks around him, as he hears people speak or sees them act, in fact, as he himself speaks or acts, the verses of the Quran flow directly to his mind and he says to himself, "This is exactly what Allah was describing. This is exactly what that passage was talking about."

This will make him realize the reality of the Quran as well as the reality of Allah's presence, the importance of believing in and submitting to Him, the reward for doing right and the punishment for doing wrong. And, furthermore, when he comes across those aspects of life that the Quran discusses, he will know how to respond in the manner that is pleasing to Allah because he knows exactly what Allah has said about that aspect in the Quran and how he should behave to attain Allah's pleasure. Far different will this person be from the one who reads the Quran and in his mind he is thinking that each verse is referring to something that happened— something past, something gone, something dead— and thereby he makes the Quran something past and dead as if it is not meant for today. The Quran, therefore, does not breathe into him the guidance that it contains— guidance that is relevant and real for every time and place.

Realizing That the Quran Has Been Revealed for the Sake of the Reader and Is Directed to Him

Allah says in the Quran,

يَاأَيُّهَا النَّاسُ قَدْ جَاءَتْكُمْ مَوْعِظَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ وَشِفَاءٌ لِمَا فِي الصُّدُورِ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةٌ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ

"O mankind, there has come to you an admonition from your Lord and a healing for the (diseases) in your hearts and for those who believe, a guidance and a mercy" (*Yoonus* 57). Hence, the Quran is a mercy, healing and guide. The reader should approach the Quran realizing fully the answer to the following questions: For whom is the Quran a mercy? For whom is the Quran a healing? For whom is the Quran a guide? In fact, for whom has the Quran actually been revealed?

The answer to all these questions is one and the same. The Quran is a mercy, healing and guide and has been revealed for the sake of every individual who wishes to believe in it and follow it. Hence, in essence, the Quran has actually been revealed for the reader himself. Furthermore, by following it and accepting its teachings, he is simply helping his own soul while, on the other hand, if he turns away from it, he simply hurts his own soul:

قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ بَصَائِرُ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَمَنْ أَبْصَرَ فَلِنَفْسِهِ وَمَنْ عَمِيَ فَعَلَيْهَا

"Verily, proofs have come to you from your Lord, so whosoever sees it, will do so (for the good) of his own self,

and whosoever blinds himself, will do so to his own harm" (*al-Anaam* 104).

قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ بَصَائِرُ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَمَنْ أَبْصَرَ فَلِنَفْسِهِ وَمَنْ عَمِيَ فَعَلَيْهَا

"Say: O mankind, now truth has come to you from your Lord. So whosoever receives guidance, he does so for the good of his own self, and whosoever goes astray, he does so to his own loss" (*Yoonus* 108).

It is true that the Quraṇ was revealed to the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) during his lifetime but the Quran was not revealed just for him and his Companions. No, indeed, the Quran was revealed for every believer until the Day of Judgment. As Murad writes,

> No doubt the Quran was sent down at a specific point in history, and you have received it indirectly through persons, time and space. But the Quran is the word of the Ever-living God, it is eternally valid and it addresses every person. So let all these intermediaries recede for a while and allow yourself to read the Quran as if it is talking directly to you, as an individual and as a member of a collectivity, in your time. The very thought of such direct reception will keep your heart seized by what you are reading.[1]

The reader must have this realization that the Quran was revealed for him and his guidance. When he approaches the Quran, he should think to himself, "In Allah's mercy, He has revealed this book for my benefit. He has revealed it so I may know my Lord and see that path that is pleasing to Him. In reality, Allah is talking directly to me in the Quran. He is guiding me directly."

[1]Murad, p. 43.

When the reader reads about the bounties of paradise and Allah's pleasure with the believers, he should realize that Allah may be talking about him being in Paradise and earning Allah's pleasure if he chooses to believe and do right. Similarly, when he reads about the Hell-fire and Allah's wrath, he should realize again that Allah might be talking about him if that is the path that he so chooses. When the person reads with this awareness, as Murad stated, his heart will be seized by what he is reading. In fact, whenever he reads about Allah's rewards for the believers, from his heart will gush forth the words, "O Allah, allow me to be one of those who earn such reward and Your pleasure"; and whenever he reads of Allah's punishment, he will immediately respond, "O Allah, save me from such an evil end and life." This is exactly the practice and the guidance of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in reading the Quran. Aishah narrated that the Prophet (peace be upon him) would never pass over a verse that mentioned "mercy" except that he would stop at that point and ask for Allah's mercy. Similarly, he would never pass over a verse that mentions punishment except that he would stop at that point and seek refuge in Allah from that punishment.[1] On another occasion, Muslim ibn Makhraq said to Aishah, "Some of the people read the whole Quran once or twice in a night." She said, "Whether they read it or don't read it [they are just reading its words but are not understanding it]. I prayed with the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) during the entire night and he read *soorah*s *al-Baqarah*, *ali-Imraan* and *al-Nisaa*. He would not pass by any verse that gave good tidings except that he would supplicate and hope for it. He would

[1]Recorded by Muslim.

also not pass by any verse that mentions any punishment except that he would supplicate and seek refuge from it."[1]

Furthermore, when any command comes from Allah in the Quran, the reader must realize that it is directed to him. Whenever Allah says, "O you who believe..." or "O mankind...", he responds as if he hears someone calling his name because he knows that these verses are addressed to him. The Companion Abdullah ibn Masood once said, "When it says, 'O you who believe...' you must listen [closely] as it is either ordering you to something that is good for you or prohibiting you something that is bad for you."

In *Ihyaa Uloom al-Deen*, Abu Haamid al-Ghazzaali wrote,

> Although everyone is addressed by the speech [or verse of the Quran], in fact, the individual is meant. The reader by himself is the one addressed. He has nothing to do with the rest of the people. He must realize that he is the addressed. Allah says, "That I may warn you and all whom it reaches" (*al-Anaam* 19).[2] Muhammad ibn Kaab al-Qurdhi stated, "Whoever the Quran reaches, it is as if Allah spoke to him." If one is able to reach this realization, then he will not consider his recitation of the Quran as his [final] deed but he will read it as a slave reads a letter from his master that [the master] wrote for him to study and act according to what it commands... And for this reason one scholar said, "This Quran

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[1] Recorded by Ahmad. According to Misfur al-Ghaamdi, it is *hasan.* See al-Ghaamdi's footnotes to Muhammad ibn Ayyoob al-Dhaaris, *Fadhaail al-Quran* (Dar Haafidh, 1988), p. 67.

[2] The entire verse reads, "Say: What thing is most weighty in evidence? Say: Allah is witness between me and you; this Quran has been revealed to me by inspiration. That I may warn you and all whom it reaches. Can you possibly bear witness that other than Allah there are gods? Say: Nay! I cannot bear witness. Say: But in truth He is the One God. And I truly am innocent of (your blasphemy of) joining others with Him."

> is letters [or messages] that have reached us from our Lord with His covenants, so that we may ponder over it in the prayers, and ponder over it in our seclusion[1] and implement it in the acts of obedience and *sunan*."[2]

Obviously the Quran is much more important than any letters from a master or friend or commands from a superior. It is the guidance of Allah for every individual. The reader must realize that this is his personal guide. It is a mercy for him personally. It is a healing for the diseases of his own heart and soul. If the person understands that the Quran is a revelation from Allah but does not fathom that it has been revealed for his own guidance, his reading will certainly be lacking. He may never come to the realization that the Quran is talking directly to him and to his heart. He may never realize that the Quran is showing him the straight path. Alas, he may read the Quran throughout his entire life and never realize that this is his guide and a mercy for him until it is too late and it will be of no avail to him.

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[1]Al-Khaalidi, *Mafaateeh*, p. 119, quoted this passage from al-Ghazzaali's work but the quote was mistaken at this point as al-Khaalidi's text states, "*khutuwat*." The mistake could have been from the edition of *al-Ihyaa* that al-Khaalidi used.

[2]Abu Haamid al-Ghazzaali, *Ihyaa Uloom al-Deen* (Beirut: Dar al-Marifa, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 285. This work has been quoted from (via al-Zabeedi's commentary on it) in a number of places in this book. It should be noted that al-Ghazaali's book is replete with fabricated, very weak and weak hadith as well as many concepts and opinions that are inconsistent with the beliefs of the *ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamaa*. At the same time, though, it does contain many passages that are quite enlightening and have been of benefit to the scholars of Islam since al-Ghazali's time. For comments on his work as a whole, see Abdul Lateef ali-Shaikh, *al-Qaul al-Mubeen fi al-Tahdheer min Kitaab Ihyaa Uloom al-Deen* (Riyadh: Daar al-Manaar, 1414 A.H.) or Ali Hasan Abdul Hameed, *Kitaab Ihyaa Uloom al-Deen fi Mizaan al-Ulamaa wa al-Muarikheen* (Dammam, Saudi Arabia: Maktaba ibn al-Jauzi, 1988).

Finally, the reader should realize that this aspect is true for every passage in the Quran. Murad perceptively noted,

> Indeed, I believe there is not a single passage in the Quran which does not have a personal message for you, only you have to have the insight to look for it. Every attribute of God asks you to build a corresponding relationship with Him, every description of the Life beyond death asks you to prepare for it, or aspire for its reward, or seek protection from its evils, every dialogue involves you in it and every character presents a model you should either emulate or avoid following. Every legal injunction, even it is apparently inapplicable in your present situation, has some message for you. Very general statements always have a specific meaning for you; very specific statements, events and situations can always lead to general propositions to apply to your lives.[1]

One final point should be made on this topic. Some people might get sidetracked by the Quran's alluding to many aspects of the life and beliefs of the Arabs at the time of its revelation. But, as Maudoodi has concisely answered, this should not be taken to mean it was revealed for them for the principles it discusses not the incidents are apparent throughout all times and places. Indeed, many of the misconceptions they had regarding belief about Allah are relevant today and an understanding of the arguments presented to them in the Quran is very important for the purposes of calling non-Muslims to Islam. Maudoodi states,

> What ought to be considered is whether or not the Quranic statements in refutation of the polytheistic beliefs of the Arabs of those days

[1]Murad, pp. 90-91.

apply as well to other fonns of polytheism in other parts of the world. Can the arguments advanced by the Quran in that connection be used to rectify the beliefs of other polytheists? Is the Quranic line of argument for establishing the unity of God, with minor adaptations, valid and persuasive for every age? If the answers are positive, there is not reason why a universal teaching should be dubbed exclusive to a particular people and age merely because it happened to be addressed originally to that people and at that particular period of time. No philosophy, ideology or doctrine consists of mere abstraction and is totally unrelated to the circumstances in which it developed.[1]

Realizing That One Is Reading the Word and Speech of Allah

Verses 190 and 191 of *soorah ali-Imraan* read,

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ
لَآيَاتٍ لِأُولِي الأَلْبَابِ الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا
وَعَلَى جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالأَرْضِ
رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هَذَا بَاطِلاً سُبْحَانَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ

"Behold, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day, there are indeed signs for men of understanding men who remember Allah standing, sitting

[1]Abul Ala Maudoodi, *An Introduction to Understanding the Quran* (Riyadh: WAMY, 1990), pp. 40-41.

and lying down on their sides, and contemplate the (wonders of) creation in the heavens and the earth, (with the saying): 'Our Lord, you have not created (all) this in vain (or for naught). Glory to You! Give us salvation from the punishment of the Fire." In these verses Allah speaks about looking at this creation and its magnificence and wonders. Surely this should make any human conscious that this creation has not been created in vain or without a reason. There obviously must be some purpose and reason for this great creation.

If that is what the perceptive person concludes from this creation, what must be his thought when he turns to the Quran realizing that it is the word and speech of Allah? It is the Word of Allah that Allah revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and preserved for all of mankind until the Day of Judgment. The word of Allah—isn't that much greater than the wonders and magnificence of the heavens and earth? The Quran is not a creation but it is the speech of Allah.[1] What can a human ever come across that should be more important or dearer to him than the Word and Speech of his Creator?

When this realization is missing, the results can be devastating. The person may not even have any desire to read the Quran if he does not consider it Allah's speech. And even if he does read it, there may be nothing to drive him to act

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[1] One should keep in mind the exact nature of the Quran. Al-Tahaawi has explained the Islamic belief concerning the Quran, "The Quran is the word of Allah. It originated from Him as an articulated speech in an unknown manner (*bila kaifiyyah*). Allah revealed it to His prophet by inspiration (*wahy*). The Believers bear witness to its revelation. They are certain that it is the actual speech of Allah. It is not created like the speech of humans. Whoever hears it and thinks it is the speech of man is an infidel. Allah has condemned and censured him and threatened him with Hell-Fire when He says, 'I will burn him in the Hell-Fire' (74:26). By Allah's threatening with the Fire those who say, 'This is nothing but the word of a mortal' (74:25) we know and become certain that it is the speech of the Creator of humans and it is completely unlike he speech of mankind." Abu al-Izz al-Hanafi, *Sharh al-Aqeedah al-Tahawiya* (forthcoming).

upon it, especially when the society around him is not applying it and that if he does apply it, and acts righteously, he may miss many of the pleasures of this world that all those around him seem to be enjoying.[1] Israr Ahmad aptly described this situation when he wrote,

> Now let us examine the condition of *our* faith in the Quran. We profess that the Quran is a Divine revelation, and indeed we should be thankful to the Almighty that He has included us among those who hold this belief about His book, but most of us are not inwardly convinced of its being the Word of God, a revelation from the Creator of the heavens and the earth. This is the real cause of our estrangement from, and indifference to, the Quran.
>
> Even causal introspection and self-examination will prove that our hearts are devoid of true belief in the Quran and that, instead of harbouring true faith, they have become the dwelling place of doubts and misgivings...
>
> This lack of faith is the reason why we neither find any reverence for the Quran in our hearts, nor feel inclined to study it, nor evince any interest in pondering over its meaning, nor think of seeking its guidance in the conduct of our lives. As long as we do not make up this dreadful deficiency, no useful purpose will be served by any amount of religious instruction.[2]

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[1]"Seem to be enjoying" because, in fact, all that the disbelievers and evildoers engage in of this world can never bring them true happiness as is very clear from their own words and strife.

[2]Israr Ahmad, *The Book and the Believer* (London: Ta-Ha Publishers, 1988), pp. 6-7.

For the Quran to have its greatest impact on the heart and soul of the reader, he should never forget exactly what the Quran is: the speech of the Creator and one and only God. The believers should take to heart what ibn Abbaas stated with respect to the verse,

وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَّكِرٍ

"We have indeed made the Quran easy to understand and remember: then is there any who will receive admonition?" (*al-Qamar* 17). It is recorded that ibn Abbaas stated "If Allah did not make it easy for humans, no one of the creation would be able to speak with the words of Allah."[1]

Perhaps al-Ghazaali captured very well the essence and magnificence of this notion when he wrote,

> [The reader must understand] the greatness and lofty stature of the speech and the bounty of Allah and His grace to His creation in revealing it from the throne of His majesty to the level of the understanding of His creation. [The reader] should consider how beneficent Allah was towards His creation in delivering to their understanding the meanings of His speech, which is one of His eternal attributes existing with His essence...[2]

When this fact is clear in the reader's mind, he definitely does not read the Quran faintheartedly. Instead, he weighs each word of the Quran and ponders over its meaning. He understands that there is some great purpose why Allah revealed and preserved His word and speech.

Again, the Quran is the word of Allah: The Speech of the Creator who is the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. In fact, on a number of

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1 Quoted in ibn Katheer, *Tafseer al-Quran al-Adheem*, p. 1282.

2 Al-Ghazaali, vol. 1, p. 280. The remainder of this passage has some questionable statements in it.

occasions Allah reminds the reader of exactly whom this revelation has come from. Allah says,

اللَّهُ لا إِلَهَ إِلاَّ هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ نَزَّلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ

"Allah! There is no god but He, the Living, the Self-Subsisting, Eternal. It is He who sent down to you the book in truth" (*ali-Imraan* 2-3). In this verse, Allah first informs the reader that there is none worthy of worship but Him and that He is the Living, the self-subsisting and then Allah states that it is that very same only God who has sent down this book. The following verses are of a similar nature:

تَنزِيلُ الْكِتَابِ مِنْ اللَّهِ الْعَزِيزِ الْعَلِيمِ غَافِرِ الذَّنْبِ وَقَابِلِ التَّوْبِ شَدِيدِ الْعِقَابِ ذِي الطَّوْلِ لا إِلَهَ إِلاَّ هُوَ إِلَيْهِ الْمَصِيرُ

"The revelation of this Book is from Allah, Exalted in Power, Full of Knowledge, Who forgives sin, accepts repentance, is strict in punishment, and has a long reach (in all things). There is no god but He: to Him is the final goal" (*Ghaafir* 2-3).

تَنزِيلٌ مِنْ الرَّحْمَانِ الرَّحِيمِ

"A revelation from (Allah), Most Gracious, Most Merciful" (*Fussilat* 2).

وَإِنَّهُ لَكِتَابٌ عَزِيزٌ لا يَأْتِيهِ الْبَاطِلُ مِنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَلا مِنْ خَلْفِهِ تَنزِيلٌ مِنْ حَكِيمٍ حَمِيدٍ

"Indeed, it is an honorable, respected book. No falsehood can approach it from before or behind it. It is sent down by One Full of Wisdom, Worthy of all Praise" (*Fussilat* 41-42). It is the revelation from the One full of wisdom, worthy of all praise. Furthermore, Allah has protected from any falsehood.

Need more be said? Need more be said to make the believer rush to the Quran to hear and read his Lord's speech and message? Can a believer read such verses reminding him of who this revelation has come from and then not give his full heart and attention to what he reads? Can anyone realize that this revelation has come from the Living, the Self-sustaining, the Compassionate, the Merciful, the Compassionate, the all-Wise and so on, and then be lackadaisical when it comes to the reading and understanding of this book?

Obviously when Muslims are more conscious of this fact that the Quran is Allah's word and speech, and what that actually implies, their attitude toward the Quran becomes different. Instead of considering reading the Quran a task, they would hasten to it to read the word of Allah.

Living in the Shade of the Quran

What one receives from the Quran, how much one understands of the Quran and how much one is truly guided by the Quran is not a static process. It is indeed a dynamic process that is directly related to one's faith and willingness to apply the Quran. As the person learns and applies the Quran, his understanding of the Quran increases even further. The one whose heart already has faith and a willingness to submit to and apply the Quran is the one who really learns the Quran. This was the case with the Companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him).

Indeed, Allah calls the Quran a guidance for those who are God-fearing and apply Islam:

ذَلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لا رَيْبَ فِيهِ هُدًى لِلْمُتَّقِينَ-الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ
بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلاةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنفِقُونَ وَالَّذِينَ

يُؤْمِنُونَ بِمَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكَ وَمَا أُنْزِلَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ وَبِالآخِرَةِ هُمْ
يُوقِنُونَ أُولَئِكَ عَلَى هُدًى مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ
الْمُفْلِحُونَ

"This is the Book, in it is guidance sure, without doubt, for those who fear Allah; who believe in the Unseen, are steadfast in prayer, and spend out of what we have provided for them. And who believe in the revelation sent to you and sent before your time, and (in their hearts) have the assurance of the Hereafter. They are on true guidance from their Lord and it is these who will prosper" (*al-Baqarah* 2-5). Commenting on these verses, Maudoodi wrote,

> This means that while the Book is potentially for all, only those who possess certain qualities can benefit from it. The first such quality is piety: those who want to benefit should be disposed to distinguish between good and evil, and to shun evil and do good. Those who lead an animal existence, who never stop to consider whether their actions are either good or bad, who cynically follow the prevailing winds, who are helplessly tossed about by the animal desires that dominate their minds, such persons are altogether incapable of deriving any benefit from the guidance embodied in the Quran.[1]

If someone's heart is filled with pride, arrogance, vanity or other diseases or if a person's only concern is to

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[1]Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi, *Towards Understanding the Quran* (Leicester: the Islamic Foundation, 1988), vol. 1, p. 45, fn. 3. In the following footnotes Maudoodi discusses the other prerequisites, mentioned in the above verses, of belief in the unseen, establishment of the prayer, giving charitably from one's wealth, belief in the books revealed and belief in the unseen.

satisfy his whims and desires, and he has the least desire to change his way of life according to the Quran, he may get nothing from his reading of the Quran. If, on the other hand, he does have some desire to mend his ways and live a goodly life, then each time he reads and applies the Quran, his understanding and application of the Quran will improve. Finally, the diseases in his heart will be removed and he will become one of the pious. And if a person whose heart and actions are pure and righteous turns to the Quran, his heart and mind will be completely attuned to it and he will be granted guidance upon the guidance that he already possessed.

وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَمَعَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

"And those who strive in Our (Cause), We will certainly guide them to Our paths: for verily Allah is with those who do right " (*al-Ankaboot* 69).

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ إِذَا ذُكِرَ اللَّهُ وَجِلَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَإِذَا تُلِيَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُهُ زَادَتْهُمْ إِيمَانًا وَعَلَى رَبِّهِمْ يَتَوَكَّلُونَ

"For believers are those who, when Allah is mentioned, feel a tremor in their hearts, and when they hear His revelations recited, find their faith strengthened, and put all their trust in their Lord" (*al-Anfaal* 2).

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَآمَنُوا بِمَا نُزِّلَ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَهُوَ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ كَفَّرَ عَنْهُمْ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ وَأَصْلَحَ بَالَهُمْ

"But those who believe and work deeds of righteousness and believe in the (revelation) sent down to Muhammad for it is

the truth from their Lord, He will remove from them their sins and improve their condition" (*Muhammad* 2).

Sayyid Qutb convincingly argues that unless one applies the Quran in his actions and actually begins to live in its shade, he will never really taste the sweetness and experience the guidance of the Quran. In one passage, he states, "The underlying lessons of this Quran will never be revealed to those who simply sit, those who discuss its texts in light of its linguistic and rhetorical principles... They are the ones who simply sit."[1] The teachings and guidance of the Quran are meant to be lived and applied to reality; as long as the person does not attempt to live and apply them, there will always be a barrier between him and the essence of the Quran. Qutb emphatically notes,

> The [sweet taste] of this Quran is not to be tasted save by the one who dives into the struggle. The one who faces the same situations concerning which it was revealed and faces them in the same way [that the Quran] faces them. Those who search for the meaning and evidences of the Quran while they are sitting studying it as speech or art only will never be able to discover the reality of the Quran from that motionless, barren sitting far away from the struggle and far away from the movement.. The reality of the Quran is never revealed to those who simply sit. Its inner truth will never expose itself to those who are overtaken by rest and relaxation while they serve other than Allah or submit to false lords and not to Allah.[2]

Maudoodi eloquently echoed the same thoughts when he wrote,

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[1]Sayyid Qutb, *Fi Dhilaal*, vol. 3, p. 1453.
[2]Ibid., vol. 4, p. 1864.

It should be remembered, nevertheless, that full appreciation of the spirit of the Quran demands practical involvement with the struggle to fulfil its mission. The Quran is neither a book of abstract theories and cold doctrines which the reader can grasp while seated in a cozy armchair, nor is it merely a religious book like other religious books, the secrets of which can be grasped in seminaries and oratories....

This is the Book which inspired and directed that great movement which began with the preaching of a message by an individual, and continued for no fewer than twenty-three years, until the Kingdom of God was truly established on earth. In this long and heart-rending struggle between Truth and falsehood, this Book unfailingly guided its followers to the eradication of the latter and the consolidation and enthronement of the former. How then could one expect to get to the heart of the Quranic truths merely by reciting its verses, without so much as stepping upon the field of battle between faith and unbelief, between Islam and Ignorance? To appreciate the Quran fully one must take it up and launch into the task of calling people to God, making it one's guide at every stage.

Then, and only then, does one meet the various experiences encountered at the time of its revelation...

Again, in keeping with the same principle, a man can neither understand the laws, the moral teachings, and the economic and political principles which the Quran embodies, nor appreciate the full import of the Quranic laws and regulation, unless he tries to implement them in his own life. Hence the individual who fails to

> translate the Quranic precepts into personal practice will fail to understand the Book.[1]

Furthermore, this Quran— this light from Allah— is something special. The one who has been blessed by Allah to receive it must realize that he has been given something special by Allah.[2] Therefore, the behavior of that person must be a dignified one, corresponding to the dignified bounty that he has received. The Companion Abdullah ibn Amr said, "The one who has memorized the Quran is carrying with him a great matter. The level of prophethood is in him except that he does not receive revelation. Therefore, the one who knows the Quran must not get angry in circumstances where the others get angry nor should he indignant when the others become indignant for in his heart is the Quran."[3]

Finally, one should realize that there is a relationship between committing sins, in other words, not living by the Quran or in its shade, and loss of knowledge. Nasr al-Umar recently stated,

> [Committing sins is] the worst of the things that destroys knowledge. It crushes knowledge as a fire devours branches. How many forbidden looks led to the loss of a great deal of knowledge. Or [how often has] a small amount of forbidden or doubtful wealth turned knowledge into a mirage... Verily Allah has stated the truth [when he said],

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[1]Maudoodi, *An Introduction*, pp. 36-39.
[2]All Muslims must feel this way with respect to their bounty of being guided to Islam. They must realize that Allah has given them something special and, in return, they should behave properly with respect to that special bounty that Allah has given them.
[3]Quoted in al-Ajuri, pp. 55-56. Its chain is sound.

> "Those truly fear Allah among His servants who have knowledge" (*Faatir* 28).[1]

Hence, the more one commits sins, the farther he strays from the Quran and the more and more difficult it becomes for him to see, understand and apply the guidance of the Quran.

In addition, sins and disobedience to Allah can lead to one's heart being hardened. One's heart can become blinded and sealed. This is one of the greatest blockades to getting the guidance from the Quran. As Allah says in the Quran,

أَفَلا يَتَدَبَّرُونَ الْقُرْآنَ أَمْ عَلَى قُلُوبٍ أَقْفَالُهَا

"Do they not ponder over the Quran or are their hearts sealed?" (*Muhammad* 24). When the heart is sealed, the light of the Quran— by Allah's will and command— is not able to penetrate it.

Murad's comments on this topic are a good conclusion concerning this matter. He wrote,

> Unless you are prepared and begin to act to shape your thoughts and actions according to the messages you receive from the Quran, all your dedication and labour may be to no avail. Mere intellectual exercises and ecstatic experiences will never bring you anywhere near the real treasures of the Quran.[2]

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[1]Nasr al-Umar, *Al-Ilm: Dharura Shariyya* (Riyadh: Dar al-Watn, 1412), p. 64. Also see Bakr Abu Zaid, *Hilyat Talib al-Ilm* (Cairo: Maktaba al-Tauiya al-Islamiya, 1989), p. 9.

[2]Murad, p. 33.

Summary

In this chapter, the goal was to discuss the optimal attitude in the believer's mind and heart upon reading the Quran. When the person is aware of the principles and approaches described in this chapter, he should be able to increase the benefit from his reading. In reality, when these principles are not applied, some impediments will then exist keeping the person from maximizing the benefits of his reading. Therefore, it is important to understand these principles well and to make sure that one is applying them properly when reading the Quran.

Summary

In this chapter, the goal was to introduce the [illegible] [illegible] Quran. [illegible] approaches [illegible] he will be able to increase the [illegible] In [illegible] these principles are [illegible] keeping [illegible] maximizing the benefits of his reading. Therefore, it is important to understand these principles well and to make sure that one is applying them properly when reading the Quran.

Chapter 7
Interpreting the Quran in a Proper Manner

The Quran has been preserved since the time of its revelation. It is still read day in and day out by a great number of Muslims. But its being preserved and read is still not sufficient for it to guide the reader to the straight path. Even if the reader understands the goals of the Quran and approaches it with the proper reverence and attitude, it still will not guide him correctly if he fails to interpret and understand it correctly. If the reader does not apply the proper principles and methodology of Quranic exegesis (*tafseer*) during his reading and study of the Quran, it will be likely that the Quran will be saying one thing and guiding him to one path while the reader gets contrary ideas from it and, thereby, follows a way other than the one that Allah is showing him in the Quran.

Interpreting the Quran Based on Knowledge

The person who desires to understand or interpret the Quran must do so based on confirmed and sound knowledge. This point must be clearly understood and realized. It has become a popular notion among many Muslims, including many of those who have converted to Islam in the West, that each and every Muslim can interpret the Quran with his heart or, in other words, based on the inspiration and guidance of his heart or what he "feels" a verse may mean. Such people argue that since it is a revelation from God, every human

should be able to comprehend it directly. If a person's heart is pure, his interpretation will then be sound and from God.[1] Therefore, it is not unusual to find meetings of Quranic study wherein people sit around and express their thoughts about the meaning of a verse, even if they have no background as to how to understand the Quran.

This is indeed a very dangerous trend; the results of this way of thinking or this approach to the Quran can be disastrous. There are numerous arguments that can be made against this way of thinking. For example, if, in fact, this notion was correct, there would have been no need whatsoever to reveal the Book to a Messenger. The Book could have simply been revealed unto a mountainside and everyone could have come and read the Book and interpreted it according to their hearts' understanding of the Book. But such, of course, was not the case and the Book was revealed to a messenger; and it was the job of that messenger to explain to mankind what had been revealed for them. Allah says,

وَأَنزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

[1]Recently a Muslim leader was asked about the best manner of understanding the Quran, he replied, "Your heart. The heart of the believer, no doubt, is the best exegesis for the Book of Allah." That is a strange statement or, at best, a statement that can easily be misunderstood and misapplied. It is a statement that none of the scholars of *tafseer* had ever made before him nor is this statement, if it is to be taken at face value, correct. Furthermore, the verse that is often used as a proof for this claim, "So fear Allah and it is Allah who teaches you" (*al-Baqara* 282), has been grossly misinterpreted. For a refutation of the way such people use this verse, see Abdul Rahmaan al-Dausiri, *Sifwat al-Athaar wa Mafaheem min Tafseer al-Quran al-Adheem* (Al-Kuwait: Daar al-Arqam, n.d.), vol. 3, p. 560.

"And We have sent down to you the message that you may explain clearly to men what is sent for them and that they may give thought" (*al-Nahl* 44).[1]

Perhaps al-Qurtubi, the famous commentator on the Quran from al-Andalus, had the harshest condemnation for those who interpreted the Quran or spoke about religion in general based on their heart's intuition or without knowledge. While commenting on the verse,

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ افْتَرَى عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا أَوْ قَالَ أُوحِيَ إِلَيَّ وَلَمْ يُوحَ إِلَيْهِ شَيْءٌ وَمَنْ قَالَ سَأُنزِلُ مِثْلَ مَا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ وَلَوْ تَرَى إِذْ الظَّالِمُونَ فِي غَمَرَاتِ الْمَوْتِ وَالْمَلائِكَةُ بَاسِطُوا أَيْدِيهِمْ أَخْرِجُوا أَنفُسَكُمْ الْيَوْمَ تُجْزَوْنَ عَذَابَ الْهُونِ بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَقُولُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ غَيْرَ الْحَقِّ وَكُنتُمْ عَنْ آيَاتِهِ تَسْتَكْبِرُونَ

"Who can be more wicked than one who invents a lie against Allah, or says, `I have received inspiration,' when he has received none, or who says, `I can reveal the like of what Allah has revealed'? If you could but see how the wicked (do fare) in the agonies of death. The angels stretch forth their hands, (saying), `Yield up your souls. This day shall you receive your reward a chastisement of disgrace for that you used to tell lies against Allah and scornfully reject His signs'" (*al-Anaam* 93), he wrote,

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[1] It is not the intent here to discuss all of the basics of *tafseer*. This author has dealt with the topic of *tafseer* in greater detail in his work, *The Methodologies of the Quranic Commentators* (Falls Church, VA: American Open University, 1997). Allah willing, a more detailed work, *Quranic Commentary: History, Sources, Principles and Methodologies*, is in progress.

> And in the same category [of those who invent lies against Allah] are those who turn away from *fiqh* and sunnah and what the pious forefathers followed and say, `In my thought this comes to mind...' or `My heart says to me...' They decide according to what occurs in their hearts and the thoughts of their minds overcome them. They claim that this is due to the purity [of their hearts] that are free of any impurity or any deceptions. And the knowledge of Godhood and reality of Lordship [they claim] is made clear to them. And they discover the secrets of the general laws and know the ruling concerning specific matters and they have no need for the general *shareeah* rulings. And they say, `These *shareeah* rulings are general and are only applied on the stupid and commoners. But the devoted servants and elite are not in need of such rulings and texts.'[1]

Later al-Qurtubi compares such people who simply say, "Ask your heart" to the *zandiqa*[2] and says that they should be killed as apostates without any need for asking them to repent.[3] (What he means by that, Allah knows best, is that if someone thinks that he has the right to interpret the Quran based solely on his heart's feelings and he spreads such false interpretations, he is to be treated like the *zandiqa* who are known to be secretly fighting against Islam.)

What actually happens when a person interprets the Quran not based on confirmed knowledge but based on the feelings of the heart is that there is then absolutely no way for the person to know if that interpretation is the result of a type of guidance or inspiration from Allah or perhaps a

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[1]Abu Abdullah Muhammad al-Qurtubi, *Al-Jaami Li-Ahkaam al-Quran* (Beirut: Daar Ihyaa al-Turaath al-Arabi, 1965), vol. 7, p. 39.
[2]These are hypocrites who outwardly embrace Islam with the sole intention of destroying Islam from within.
[3]Ibid., vol. 7, p. 39.

deception from Satan. Mention has already been made concerning how Satan attempts to disturb the reader of the Quran's understanding and reading. Furthermore, Allah says,

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ مِنْ رَسُولٍ وَلَا نَبِيٍّ إِلَّا إِذَا تَمَنَّى أَلْقَى الشَّيْطَانُ فِي أُمْنِيَّتِهِ فَيَنْسَخُ اللَّهُ مَا يُلْقِي الشَّيْطَانُ ثُمَّ يُحْكِمُ اللَّهُ آيَاتِهِ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ

"Never did We send a messenger or a prophet before you but when he recites the revelation, Satan threw in some falsehood into the ears of listeners, but Allah abolishes that which Satan throws in. Then Allah establishes His revelations. And Allah is All-Knower, All-Wise" (*al-Hajj* 52). If this is what Satan tries with respect to the Prophets, there is no question that he will try the same or similar with the believers. And even if the thought concerning the verse is not from Satan, the person may not be certain that it is not simply the results of the desires of his ego or soul (Ar., *hawa*[1]). With no methodology or no visible sound principles, the person can in no way prove which one of those three (Allah, Satan or one's *hawa*) is the source of his heart's interpretation of the Quran.[2]

If the person's interpretation is not based on sound knowledge that he can present as evidence for his interpretation or if it contradicts what sound knowledge has been passed on concerning *tafseer*, his interpretation most likely or definitely comes from his own *hawa* or Satan. Certainly it must be stated bluntly that those people who

[1]This is the Quranic term. *Hawa* (pl., *ahwaa`*) may be defined as "love and attachment, inclination, especially blameworthy inclination; the inclination of the soul to that which the animal appetites take delight, without any lawful invitation thereto; love and desire." Lane, vol. 2, p. 3046.

[2]As shall be shown later, there are some signs that indicate if the interpretation is from Satan or from the person's own desires.

interpret the Quran supposedly according to their hearts and contradict the confirmed sources of *tafseer* are doing nothing but following their own *hawa* or Satan. This is very dangerous as Allah has stated concerning following one's own *hawa*,

فَإِنْ لَمْ يَسْتَجِيبُوا لَكَ فَاعْلَمْ أَنَّمَا يَتَّبِعُونَ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ وَمَنْ أَضَلُّ مِمَّنْ اتَّبَعَ هَوَاهُ بِغَيْرِ هُدًى مِنْ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ

"But [O Prophet] if they do not respond to you, then know that they only follow their own lusts. And who is more astray than one who follows his own lusts (Ar., *hawaahu*) without guidance from Allah? Verily, Allah guides not the wrong-doing people" (*al-Qasas* 50);

بَلْ اتَّبَعَ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا أَهْوَاءَهُمْ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ فَمَنْ يَهْدِي مَنْ أَضَلَّ اللَّهُ وَمَا لَهُمْ مِنْ نَاصِرِينَ

"Nay, those who do wrong follow their one lusts (Ar., *ahwaa`*) without knowledge. But who will guide him whom Allah sends astray? And for such there will be no helpers" (*al-Room* 29);

أَفَكُلَّمَا جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ بِمَا لا تَهْوَى أَنفُسُكُمْ اسْتَكْبَرْتُمْ فَفَرِيقًا كَذَّبْتُمْ وَفَرِيقًا تَقْتُلُونَ

"Is it that whenever there came to you an apostle with what you yourselves desired not, you grew arrogant?" (*al-Baqarah* 87);

أَرَأَيْتَ مَنْ اتَّخَذَ إِلَهَهُ هَوَاهُ أَفَأَنْتَ تَكُونُ عَلَيْهِ وَكِيلاً

"Have you not seen him who has taken as his God his own desires? Would you then be guardian over him?" (*al-Furqaan* 43);

أَفَرَأَيْتَ مَنْ اتَّخذَ إِلَهَهُ هَوَاهُ وَأَضَلَّهُ اللَّهُ عَلَى عِلْمٍ وَخَتَمَ عَلَى سَمْعِهِ وَقَلْبِهِ وَجَعَلَ عَلَى بَصَرِهِ غِشَاوَةً فَمَنْ يَهْدِيهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ اللَّهِ أَفَلا تَذَكَّرُونَ

"Then do you see one who takes as his god his own vain desire? Allah has, knowing (him as such), left him astray, and sealed his hearing and his heart (and understanding), and put a cover over his sight. Who, then, will guide him after Allah (has withdrawn guidance)? Will you not then receive admonition?" (*al-Jaathiyya* 23).

Since such interpretations are not based on sound knowledge and cannot be proven, they also must come under the Quranic description of following *dhann*. *Dhann* means, in this case, conjecture, something that has no evidence or strong basis for it, simply guesswork.[1] Allah censures those who follow *dhann* as He also censures those who follow their own *hawa*. Verses concerning *hawa* have already been

[1]One must distinguish between *al-yaqeen* (اليقين), *al-dhann al-raajih* (الظن الراجح) and *al-dhann al-marjooh* (الظن المرجوح). *Al-yaqeen* may be translated as "certainty" and implies a case where something is firmly established and there is no room for questioning it. *Al-dhann al-raajih* is somewhat corresponding to saying, "the preponderance of the evidence shows..." This means there is some evidence and that evidence is strong although it is not to the level of *yaqeen*. It is obligatory upon the Muslims to believe in and follow what is termed *al-dhann al-raajih* by the legal theorists. *Al-dhann al-marjooh*, on the other hand, is a supposition that has no evidence for it and it also applies to the case where the preponderance of the evidence is against a particular argument or opinion. This latter kind of *dhann* that has no strong or acceptable basis for believing in it is the type of *dhann* described in the verses quoted above.

quoted. Here are some verses concerning the following of *dhann*:

وَمَا يَتَّبِعُ أَكْثَرُهُمْ إِلاَّ ظَنًّا إِنَّ الظَّنَّ لا يُغْنِي مِنَ الْحَقِّ شَيْئًا

"And most of them follow nothing but a conjecture (Ar., *dhann*), certainly a conjecture cannot avail against the truth" (*Yoonus* 36);

إِنْ يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلاَّ الظَّنَّ وَمَا تَهْوَى الأَنْفُسُ وَلَقَدْ جَاءَهُمْ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ الْهُدَى

"They follow but a guess and that which their souls desire. And indeed there has already come to them the Guidance from their Lord" (*al-Najm* 23)[1];

وَمَا لَهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ إِنْ يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلاَّ الظَّنَّ وَإِنَّ الظَّنَّ لا يُغْنِي مِنَ الْحَقِّ شَيْئًا

"They have no knowledge thereof and they follow but a conjecture (Ar., *dhann*); and verily conjecture avails nothing against Truth" (*al-Najm* 28).

The Danger of Speaking Without Knowledge

Every Muslim must realize that every time he interprets the Quran, he is actually making a statement on behalf of Allah. He is not simply interpreting a writing like any other writing but he is actually saying, whether he realizes it or not, "This is what Allah is saying..." or "This is what Allah means..." Perhaps, when looked at in this manner, the gravity of interpreting the Quran without proper knowledge is appreciated. Indeed, all of the earlier nations

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[1]In this verse, Allah juxtaposes living according to the guidance that has come from Allah as opposed to living according to *hawa* or *dhann*.

were punished and destroyed by Allah because they made statements and claims about Allah concerning which they had no knowledge and no authority from Him. Allah says,

وَمِنْ النَّاسِ مَنْ يُجَادِلُ فِي اللَّهِ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ وَلا هُدًى وَلا كِتَابٍ مُنِيرٍ ثَانِيَ عِطْفِهِ لِيُضِلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ لَهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا خِزْيٌ وَنُذِيقُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ عَذَابَ الْحَرِيقِ

"Yet there is among men such a one as disputes about Allah, without knowledge, without guidance, and without any book of enlightenment (disdainfully) bending his side, in order to lead (men) astray from the path of Allah. For him is disgrace in this life, and on the Day of Judgment We shall make him taste the chastisement of burning (Fire)" (*al-Hajj* 8-9).

Allah also states,

وَلا تَقُولُوا لِمَا تَصِفُ أَلْسِنَتُكُمْ الْكَذِبَ هَذَا حَلالٌ وَهَذَا حَرَامٌ لِتَفْتَرُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ الْكَذِبَ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَفْتَرُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ الْكَذِبَ لا يُفْلِحُونَ

"But say not for any false thing that your tongues may put forth `This is lawful and this is forbidden,' so as to ascribe false things to Allah. For those who ascribe false things to Allah will never prosper" (*al-Nahl* 116). Ibn Katheer points out that the ruling in this verse applies to anyone who innovates any belief or action in Islam without any textual support or evidence for said belief or action, as well as anyone who permits what Allah has prohibited or prohibits what Allah has permitted simply on the basis of his personal opinion or desires.[1]

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[1]Ibn Katheer, *Tafseer al-Quran al-Adheem,* p. 756.

In fact, Allah says concerning the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) himself,

وَلَوْ تَقَوَّلَ عَلَيْنَا بَعْضَ الْأَقَاوِيلِ لَأَخَذْنَا مِنْهُ بِالْيَمِينِ ثُمَّ لَقَطَعْنَا مِنْهُ الْوَتِينَ فَمَا مِنْكُمْ مِنْ أَحَدٍ عَنْهُ حَاجِزِينَ

"And if the messenger were to invent any sayings in Our name, We should certainly seize him by his right hand and We should certainly cut off the artery of his heart; Nor could any of you withhold him (from Our wrath)" (*al-Haaqqah* 44-47). This is a threat or promise from Allah that if even the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) should make any statement or attribute anything to Allah's religion not based on revelation and knowledge from Allah, then Allah would certainly seize him and punish him. If Allah were to do that to his beloved prophet whose heart was pure, sincere and true to Allah, what would Allah do to anyone else whose heart could not possibly be as pure and sincere to Allah as the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) heart was?

In the Quran, Allah mentions speaking without knowledge in conjunction with *shirk* (ascribing partners to Allah) in the following verse,

قُلْ إِنَّمَا حَرَّمَ رَبِّيَ الْفَوَاحِشَ مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا وَمَا بَطَنَ وَالْإِثْمَ وَالْبَغْيَ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ وَأَنْ تُشْرِكُوا بِاللَّهِ مَا لَمْ يُنَزِّلْ بِهِ سُلْطَانًا وَأَنْ تَقُولُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

"Say: The things that my Lord has indeed forbidden are: indecent deeds, whether open or secret, sins and trespasses against truth, assigning of partners to Allah for which He has given no authority, and saying things about Allah of which you have no knowledge" (*al-Araaf* 33).

In *Madaarij al-Saalikeen*, ibn al-Qayyim has a lengthy passage concerning this verse from *soorah al-Araaf*

and speaking without knowledge. He states that speaking without knowledge is perhaps the greatest sin and most prohibited act. That is why Allah mentions it fourth among the items that are prohibited in themselves by all religions. Such acts are never permissible under any circumstances. He points out that some forbidden acts are forbidden in themselves (*haraam lidhaatihi*) because of their essential evil while others are forbidden because of what they may lead to (*haraam lighairihi*). The former type, like the four mentioned in the verse including speaking about Allah without knowledge, are never permissible while the latter type, like the eating of carrion or pork, may be permissible under extreme exceptional circumstances.

Ibn al-Qayyim mentions that Allah first states, "indecent deeds, whether open or secret." Then Allah moves on to a greater sin, "sins and trespasses against truth." Then Allah mentions something even more horrendous than that, "assigning of partners to Allah for which He has given no authority." Then Allah finally mentions the most horrendous and abominable act, "saying things about Allah of which you have no knowledge". This is the greatest sin because it involves and includes ascribing something falsely to Allah, changing or altering Allah's religion, denying what He has confirmed or confirming what He has denied, affirming something declared false or declaring false something declared true by Allah. It also includes supporting something Allah opposes, liking something He dislikes or disliking something He loves. Finally, it also includes attributing to Allah actions, attributes and statements that are not becoming of Him.

Ibn al-Qayyim goes on to say that no forbidden act is greater in sin than speaking about religion without knowledge. In fact, he states, it is the real source of polytheism and disbelief. Every polytheist claims that what he takes as an object of worship other than Allah brings him closer to Allah and intercedes in his behalf in Allah's

presence. Therefore, every polytheist speaks or makes claims about Allah and His religion without knowledge. (But not vice-versa that is, not everyone who speaks about religion without knowledge is a polytheist.)

Speaking about Allah and His religion without knowledge also includes creating heresies in the religion which is an act more general than polytheism. Therefore, innovations and misguided acts are also built upon speaking without knowledge. Every heresy has as its foundation an opinion that is not supported by the Quran or sunnah.

It is for this reason, says ibn al-Qayyim, that the pious forefathers of Islam were most stringent in their repudiation of those who spoke without knowledge or who gave opinions without any backing or evidence from the Quran, sunnah or other acceptable sources.[1]

The Early Generations of Islam and Interpreting the Quran According to Unfounded Personal Opinion (*Ra'i*)

The Companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) were the most knowledgeable of the Quran. They lived under its guidance for many years. They witnessed the revelation of the Quran and the events it refers to. They were brought up and taught the Quran by the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) himself. Indeed, Allah chose them to be the Companions of the Prophet and they were the best of all generations in knowledge and fear of Allah, as the Prophet (peace be upon him) described them.

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[1]Shams al-Deen Muhammad ibn al-Qayyim, *Madaarij al-Saalikeen Baina Manaazil Iyyaaka Nabudu Wa Iyyaaka Nastaeen* (Beirut: Daar al-Kitaab al-Arabi, 1972), vol. 1, pp. 372-373. Also see Shams al-Deen Muhammad ibn al-Qayyim, *Ilaam al-Muwaqieen an Rabb al-Alameen* (Beirut: Daar al-Jeel, 1973), vol. 1, pp. 38-39; Muhammad Raslaan, *Afaat al-Ilm* (Cairo: Daar al-Uloom al-Islaamiyyah, 1990), pp. 33-45.

If anyone could make the claim that they have the right to interpret the Quran according to their heart's feelings or personal opinion or without basing their interpretation on sound evidence, it would be the Companions.[1] Instead, they knew very well what a grave sin it is to speak about the Quran without confirmed knowledge or in accordance with their opinions or desires. This they made clear in many of their statements. For example, Abu Bakr, the first caliph, once said, "What earth would give me a home and what sky would shade me if I should speak about the Quran with my personal opinion or by something I do not know."[2] Umar ibn al-Khattaab stated, "Beware of using your opinion in religious matters."[3] Ibn Abbaas, the great scholar of the

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1 "Unfounded personal opinion" would include an opinion simply based on one's feeling without having any text or principle to back it up, interpreting a verse without studying the meaning or ramifications of the verse itself, interpreting a verse based on one's school of thought or preconceived notion and so forth. Cf., ibn Ashoor, vol. 1, pp. 30-31.

2 This has been narrated from Abu Bakr in a number of different sources. Abu al-Ashbaal al-Zuhairi declares its chain as found in ibn Abdul Barr's *Jaami Bayaan al-Ilm wa Fadhlihi* to be *hasan*. [See Abu al-Ashbaal al-Zuhairi, footnotes to Yoosuf ibn Abdul Barr, *Jaami Bayaan al-Ilm wa Fadhlihi* (al-Damam, Saudi Arabia: Daar ibn al-Jauzi, 1996), vol. 2, pp. 833-834.] However, it seems that it has a broken chain. Indeed all of the narrations of this report back to Abu Bakr seem to have broken chains between Abu Bakr and the one who narrated it on his authority. However, together the independent reports may be used to support each other and the quote may be considered acceptable. Allah knows best. For more about the chains of this report, see Abu Ishaaq al-Huwaini, footnotes to Ismaaeel ibn Katheer, *Tafseer al-Quran al-Adheem* (al-Damam, Saudi Arabia: Daar ibn al-Jauzi, 1997), vol. 1, p. 126.

3 Many other statements of this nature were made by other Companions. See Abu Amr ibn Abdul Barr, *Jaami Bayaan al-Ilm wa Fadhlihi* (Beirut: Daar al-Kutub al-Ilmiya, 1978), vol. 2, pp. 134-136. There are also some hadith on this topic that should be discussed here. Ibn Abbaas reported that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "Whoever speaks about the Quran without knowledge shall take his seat in the hell-fire." (Recorded by al-Tirmidhi.) Jundub reported that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "Whoever speaks about the Quran according to his personal opinion then even if what he says is correct, he is still committing an error." (Recorded

Quran whom the Prophet (peace be upon him) himself had prayed to Allah to grant him the understanding of the Quran, once said, "All there is [to follow and obey] is the Book of Allah and the sunnah of His messenger (peace be upon him). Whoever makes any statement after those two according to his opinion, then I do not know if he will find it among his good deeds or among his sins."[1] Al-Tirmidhi said, "It has been related from some of the people of knowledge of the Companions of the Prophet and others that they were very strict when it came to speaking about the Quran without knowledge."[2]

The Companions of the Prophet passed on their knowledge and understanding of Islam to their students. These students in turn passed it on to their students. During these first three generations of Islam, great strides, effort and sacrifices were made for the sake of attaining knowledge and practicing and implementing Islam. Perhaps this is why the Prophet (peace be upon him) said,

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by Abu Dawood and al-Tirmidhi.) Scholars like al-Tirmidhi, al-Haakim and al-Suyooti consider these hadith to be *sahih* or *hasan* but this is because they were sometimes not very strict when it comes to grading hadith. Other, more exacting, scholars such as Ahmad, al-Bukhari, al-Munaawi, al-Albaani and al-Arnaoot have declared these hadith to be weak. [For a more detailed discussion of these two hadith, see Abdul Raoof al-Munaawi, *Faidh al-Qadeer* (Beirut: Daar al-Marafa, 1972), vol. 6, pp. 190-1; al-Hussain al-Baghawi, *Sharh al-Sunnah* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islaami, 1983), vol. 1, pp. 257-259; Muhammad al-Tabreezi, *Mishkaat al-Masaabeeh* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islaami, 1979), vol. 1, p. 79.] Although these two hadith are weak, there are many reports from the early Muslims (*al-salaf al-saalih*), as stated above, that show that they feared speaking about or interpreting the Quran without sound knowledge or confirmed information. In fact, these two hadith themselves, although not confirmed as statements of the Prophet (peace be upon him) are most likely statements of the Companion ibn Abbaas.

[1]Quoted in Abdul Jaleel Abdul Raheem, *Laughat al-Quran al-Kareem* (Amman: Maktabah al-Risaalah al-Hadeethah, 1981), p. 432.

[2]Quoted in al-Baghawi, vol. 1, p. 259.

خَيْرُ أُمَّتِي قَرْنِي ثُمَّ الَّذِينَ يَلُونَهُمْ ثُمَّ الَّذِينَ يَلُونَهُمْ

"The best of my Nation are my generation, then the generation that follows it, and then the generation that follows it."[1] Part of what they learned from the Companions and part of what made them such great generations was their avoidance of speaking concerning religious matters without knowledge, in obedience to the Quranic commands quoted earlier. Masrooq said, "Be cautious when it comes to *tafseer*, as you are narrating something from Allah." Whenever Saeed ibn al-Musayyab was asked about the Quran he would say, "We do not say anything [based on our opinions] when it comes to the Quran."[2]

Proper Sources and Methodology of *Tafseer*

The above has been meant to drive home the following point: If the reader is sincere in his desire to be guided by the Quran, he must realize that the verses of the Quran have specific meanings and are not open to interpretation based on anyone's whims or fancies. He should realize that certain principles or a certain methodology must be invoked in order to extract the proper meaning of the Quran. If the reader does not have the proper knowledge or background to interpret the Quran, he should turn to those who do and accept their explanations that are based on sound evidence about the meanings of the verses; he is never free to allow himself to interpret the Quran in any way he wishes.

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[1]Recorded by al-Bukhari on the authority of Imraan ibn Husain.

[2]These and other similar quotes may be found in Muhammad Hussain al-Dhahabi, *Al-Tafseer wa al-Mufasiroon* (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-Hadeetha, 1976), vol. 1, p. 260. The topic of making *ijtihaad* in *tafseer* is a different topic that shall be dealt with later.

From the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) Allah not only ensured the correctness of the wording of the Quran but He also expounded the meaning of the Quran to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the Prophet (peace be upon him) in turn conveyed that meaning to his Companions. Allah states,

لا تُحَرِّكْ بِهِ لِسَانَكَ لِتَعْجَلَ بِهِ إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا جَمْعَهُ وَقُرْآنَهُ فَإِذَا
قَرَأْنَاهُ فَاتَّبِعْ قُرْآنَهُ ثُمَّ إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا بَيَانَهُ

"Move not your tongue (O Prophet) concerning the (Quran) to make haste therewith. It is for Us to collect it and to recite it. But when We have recited it, follow its recital (as promulgated). Nay more, it is for Us to explain it (and make it clear)" (*al-Qiyaamah* 16-20). Hence, the meaning or explanation of the Quran is something that has been established by Allah Himself as He gave the knowledge of the meaning of the Quran to the Prophet (peace be upon him).

If one does not know how to interpret the Quran and is not knowledgeable of the sciences involved, it is quite possible for him to derive incorrect conclusions from the Quran. Some people who are ignorant of the rules of the Arabic language will read the Quran and make mistaken interpretations due to their lack of knowledge with respect to the Arabic language. Other people may not be familiar with the context of the revelations and therefore they may make wrong conclusions concerning the meaning of certain verses.

This may occur to people who are otherwise strongly founded in Islamic knowledge. For example, the Companion Qudaamah ibn Madhun[1] (may Allah be pleased with him)

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[1] Qudaamah ibn Madhoon was an excellent Companion of the Prophet (peace be upon him). He had emigrated to both Abyssinia and Madinah and he was from among those who participated in the Battle of Badr. His sincerity cannot be doubted but sincerity alone cannot keep one from making mistakes, as is clear in the example noted above.

was of the opinion that alcohol was permissible because Allah says in the Quran,

لَيسَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ جُنَاحٌ فِيمَا طَعِمُوا

"There shall be no sin imputed unto those who believe and do good deeds for what they may have eaten" (*al-Maaidah* 93). He thought that he was among those who believed and did good deeds and hence there should be no sin imputed to him no matter what he ate or drank. Had he considered or known the context of this revelation (Ar., *asbaab al-nuzool*), he would not have made such a mistaken interpretation. This verse was actually revealed after alcohol was made illegal and some of the Companions asked about those people who had been killed in the way of Allah and yet they had drunk alcohol. Then Allah revealed this verse stating that there is no sin upon those who ate or drank forbidden foods before the verses forbidding such foods were revealed.[1]

In fact, this type of mistake was alluded to by Ibn Abbaas. One time Umar wondered why this nation of Islam would be split into groups when its Prophet is one and its *qiblah* is one. He sent for Ibn Abbaas and asked him about this. Ibn Abbaas stated, "O Leader of the Believers, the Quran has been revealed to us and we recite it and we know about what it has been revealed. After us there will be a people who will recite the Quran but not know the context in which it has been revealed. Therefore, they will use their opinions (to interpret the Quran) and when they resort to their opinions, they shall differ and fight each other."[2]

Hence it is vital to realize what the sources of *tafseer* are and what standing these sources have. Without this

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[1]Recorded by al-Nasaai in *Sunan al-Kubra*, al-Baihaqi and Abdul Razaaq.

[2]This incident was quoted in Jamaal al-Deen al-Qaasimi, *Mahaasan al-Taweel* (Beirut: Daar al-Fikr, 1978), vol. 1, p. 28.

knowledge, one will not have the proper tools and will not know the methodology needed to interpret the Quran in a proper manner and, hence, once again, he may read the Quran and still not receive the guidance that the Quran has to offer.

The Quran as a Source of *Tafseer*

Allah states,

أَفَلا يَتَدَبَّرُونَ الْقُرْآنَ وَلَوْ كَانَ مِنْ عِنْدِ غَيْرِ اللَّهِ لَوَجَدُوا فِيهِ اخْتِلافًا كَثِيرًا

"Do they not ponder on the Quran? Had it been from other than Allah, they would surely have found therein much discrepancy" (*al-Nisaa* 82). Allah also says,

اللَّهُ نَزَّلَ أَحْسَنَ الْحَدِيثِ كِتَابًا مُتَشَابِهًا

"Allah has revealed (from time to time) the most beautiful message in the form of a Book, consistent with itself" (*al-Zumar* 23). All of the Quran is a revelation from Allah. There is absolutely no contradiction between any of its marvelous verses, as Allah explicitly states in the verses just quoted.[1] One of the greatest mistakes that has been made in the history of Islam is not looking at the Quran as an entire entity or one entire whole with parts of it explaining its other

[1]Some people do not study or ponder the verses sufficiently in order to understand them properly. This lackadaisical approach to the Quran leads them to believe that there is some contradiction between particular verses. But this apparent "contradiction," when it seems to occur, is simply superficial and may always be easily removed with greater thought. For a work on apparently contradictory verses and the resolution of their differences see Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Qutaiba, *Taweel Mushkil al-Quran* (Madina: al-Maktaba al-Ilmiyya, 1981), passim.

its other parts.[1] Abu Ali al-Faarisi stated that the entire Quran can be considered as if it were simply one *soorah* and not many *soorahs*, what is stated in one place may be responded to elsewhere.[2]

Ibn Taimiyyah wrote,

> If a questioner asks, "What is the best methodology of *tafseer*?" the response is that the best mode of *tafseer* is to explain the Quran by [other verses] of the Quran. What is stated generally in one place is explained in another. And what is put in an abbreviated manner in one place is presented in detail in another.[3]

Similarly, Al-Zarkashi stated, "The best way to interpret the Quran is by using the Quran itself. What is stated in a concise fashion in one place may be elaborated upon at another place."[4] Actually, this is a principle agreed upon by the commentators on the Quran. This is the best and most trustworthy manner of *tafseer* because no one knows the meaning of the Quran better than Allah.[5]

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[1]In the history of Islam this error has led to the development of different heretical groups. For example, with respect to the question of free will and predestination, different groups looked to only specific verses and neglected to judge those specific chosen verses in the light of other related verses in the Quran. Hence, groups such as the Qadariya appeared in Islam whose teachings contradict the Quran because they neglected specific verses and adhered to other specific verses without attempting to discover what the true resolution between the different verses is.

[2]Quoted in Musaad al-Jafar, *Athar al-Tatawur al-Fikri fi al-Tafseer fi al-Asr al-Abbasi* (Beirut: Muassasat al-Risaala, 1984), p. 75.

[3]Ahmad ibn Taimiya, *Muqadimmah fi Usool al-Tafseer* (Beirut: Daar al-Quran al-Kareem, 1979), p. 93.

[4]Badr al-Din Al-Zarkashi, *Al-Burhaan fi Uloom al-Quran* (Beirut: Daar al-Marafa, n.d.), vol. 2, p. 175.

[5]Note that some scholars object to calling the Quran itself a "source of *tafseer*." The difference on this point is one of semantics only as the application— interpreting specific verses of the Quran in light of other

The Quran itself points to this ever important principle of *tafseer*. Verse seven of *ali-Imraan* reads,

هو الذي أنزل عليك الكتاب منه آيات محكمات هن أم الكتاب وأخر متشابهات

"It is He who sent down to you (Muhammad) the Book. In it are verses that are entirely clear, they are the foundation of the Book; others are not entirely clear..."[1] The events leading up to the revelation of this verse (*asbaab al-nuzool*) make it clear that the unclear or equivocal verses of the Quran are to be interpreted in the light of those verses which are unequivocal and clear, which form the foundation of the Book. This verse was revealed when a group of Christians from Najraan came to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and

Quranic verses— is the same between those scholars who call the Quran a source of *tafseer* and those who object to this nomenclature.

[1]This is a verse that has been mistranslated and misinterpreted by a number of people who have translated the Quran into English, including Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, T. B. Irving, Muhammad Asad, M. M. Khatib, Muhammad Ali, Muhammad Farooqi-Azam Malik and Ahmed Ali. The word *mutashaabih* does not mean allegorical or figurative (as all of these people have translated it). This is clear from the *asbaab al-nuzool* of the verse stated above as well as the statements of the early commentators on the Quran. Its meaning is "equivocal or ambiguous; i.e., susceptible of different interpretations... that of which the meaning is not to be learned [directly] from its words" (Lane, vol. 2, p. 1500) as opposed to the *muhkam* verses— that *ali-Imraan* verse 7 refers to as the foundation of the Book— whose meanings are clear in and by themselves and which are not open to different interpretations. One must conclude from the verse that the principle to be applied is that the verses which are *mutashaabih* are to be interpreted in light of the verses which are *muhkam*. Cf., Muhammad Sulaiman al-Ashqar, *Zubdat al-Tafseer min Fath al-Qadeer* (Kuwait: Wizaarat al-Auqaf, 1988), p. 63. Concerning why Allah revealed such verses which are *mutashaabih* as opposed to revealing just *muhkam* verses, see Khaalid Abdul Rahmaan al-Ik, *Usool al-Tafseer wa Qawaaiduh* (Beirut: Daar al-Nafaais, 1986), pp. 293-295.

debated with him concerning the nature of God and claimed that the Quran supported their view of trinity.[1] Their claim was verses like "Verily We have revealed the message..." in which the plural form is used for Allah. Obviously, though, if such verses where the plural is used[2] are compared to unequivocal, clear verses, such as,

اللَّهُ لا إِلَهَ إِلاَّ هُوَ

"Allah, there is no God but He" (*al-Baqarah* 255) and,

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ

"Say: He is Allah the One, the Self-Sufficient" (*al-Ikhlaas* 1-2), it is clear that the meaning of the verses in which the plural form is used for Allah is not that there are a plurality of gods or any concept of trinity.

The important conclusion from the above is that the Quran is a source of *tafseer*. More importantly, it is an infallible source of *tafseer*. If anyone tries to interpret any verse of the Quran in such a way that it contradicts any other Quranic verse,[3] then that interpretation must be rejected as false and unacceptable.

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[1]See Ibn Hishaam, *Al-Seerah al-Nubuwiya* (Jordan: al-Maktab al-Manaar, 1988), vol. 2, pp. 257-259.

[2]These verses are ambiguous in the sense that the plural could be referring to Allah only as in the speech of royalty (such as the Queen of England who still says We when referring to herself) or it could refer to Allah and the angels (as ibn Taimiyyah argues) or it could refer to a plurality of gods (as the Christians of Najraan claimed). Hence such verses are *mutashaabih* and must be explained in the light of the *muhkam* verses.

[3]With the exception of the well-known and established abrogating and abrogated verses.

Examples of the Quran Explaining Itself

Examples should make this principle clearer. There is no question that the Quran contains verses whose wording or meanings are general, non-detailed, unspecific and sweeping. At the same time there are other verses that are specific, detailed, express and precise. Many times what is stated in general terms in one verse is made explicit or explained in detail in another verse.

This principle is especially true with respect to the different narrations concerning the prophets that were sent by Allah before the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon them all). In many cases their stories and lives are presented in a most succinct manner while in other places they are narrated in much detail. For example, in *soorah al-Naaziaat* verses fifteen through twenty-five, Allah gives a scanty picture of the story of Moses but Moses' life is discussed in detail in *soorah al-Qasas*, verses two through forty-four.

Another example includes the verse wherein Allah says,

فَتَلَقَّى آدَمُ مِنْ رَبِّهِ كَلِمَاتٍ فَتَابَ عَلَيْهِ

"Then Adam received from his Lord words and He relented toward him" (*al-Baqarah* 37). In this verse, the words that were revealed to Adam are not mentioned but in another verse it states,

قَالا رَبَّنَا ظَلَمْنَا أَنفُسَنَا وَإِنْ لَمْ تَغْفِرْ لَنَا وَتَرْحَمْنَا لَنَكُونَنَّ مِنْ الْخَاسِرِينَ

"They [Adam and Eve] said, `Our Lord! We have wronged ourselves. If You forgive us not and have not mercy on us, surely we are of the lost'" (*al-Araaf* 23).[1]

Similarly, another verse states,

وَلَكِنْ حَقَّتْ كَلِمَةُ الْعَذَابِ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ

"Yea, verily, but the statement of doom for disbelievers is fulfilled" (*al-Zumar* 71). In this verse it is not stated what the "statement" is referring to but the explanation for this verse may be found in *soorah al-Sajdah*,

وَلَوْ شِئْنَا لَآتَيْنَا كُلَّ نَفْسٍ هُدَاهَا وَلَكِنْ حَقَّ الْقَوْلُ مِنِّي لَأَمْلَأَنَّ جَهَنَّمَ مِنْ الْجِنَّةِ وَالنَّاسِ أَجْمَعِينَ

"And if We had so willed, We could have given every soul its guidance, but the statement from Me concerning evildoers took effect: that I will fill hell with the jinn and mankind together" (*al-Sajdah* 13)

In *soorah al-Faatiha*, it states,

اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ

"Show us the straight path, the path of those whom You have favored." In the verse, it does not explicitly mention who are those favored by Allah. The explanation for this verse is not to be found in *soorah al-Faatiha* but may be found in *soorah al-Nisaa*, verse 69,

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[1]Perhaps the best *tafseer* with respect to explaining the verses of the Quran by other verses in the Quran is the late Muhammad al-Ameen al-Shanqeeti's *Adhwaa al-Bayaan fi Eedhaah al-Quran bi-l-Quran* (Riyadh: Daar al-Ifta, 1983). In fact, most of the examples presented here are taken from this *tafseer*.

وَمَنْ يُطِعِ اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنَ النَّبِيِّينَ وَالصِّدِّيقِينَ وَالشُّهَدَاءِ وَالصَّالِحِينَ وَحَسُنَ أُولَٰئِكَ رَفِيقًا

"Whoever obeys Allah and the messenger, they are with those unto whom Allah has shown favor: of the prophets and the sincere and the martyrs and the righteous."

Sometimes the reason for an action may not be explicitly mentioned in one verse but is explained in another verse. Allah states,

ثُمَّ قَسَتْ قُلُوبُكُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَٰلِكَ فَهِيَ كَالْحِجَارَةِ أَوْ أَشَدُّ قَسْوَةً

"Then, even after that, your hearts were hardened and became as rocks, or worse than rocks in hardness" (*al-Baqarah* 74). Al-Shanqeeti writes,

> It is not made clear the reason why their hearts became hard but in other places [the reason] is alluded to, such as, "And because of their breaking the covenant, We have cursed them and made their hearts hard" (*al-Maaidah* 13). And, "But the term was prolonged for them and their hearts were hardened" (*al-Hadeed* 16).[1]

Sayyid Qutb has done a good job in using this principle of explaining the Quran by other verses of the Quran in his discussion of the verses concerning the nature and creation of Jesus (peace be upon him). The Quran uses some terms for Jesus that have become confusing even for some Muslims today.[2] Allah states in the Quran,

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[1]Al-Shanqeeti, vol. 1, p. 16.

[2]Especially those living in the West who may have been influenced by Christianity.

إِنَّمَا الْمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ وَكَلِمَتُهُ أَلْقَاهَا إِلَى مَرْيَمَ وَرُوحٌ مِنْهُ

"Jesus the Messiah, the son of Mary, was (no more than) a messenger of Allah, and His word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a spirit proceeding from Him" (*al-Nisaa* 171). The phrases "His word" and "a spirit proceeding from Him" have been the source of confusion for some. Qutb eloquently explains them by referring to other verses of the Quran. Concerning, "His word, which He bestowed on Mary," Qutb states that this is similar to another expression found often in the Quran and that is Allah's word, "Be," as in,

إِنَّمَا قَوْلُنَا لِشَيْءٍ إِذَا أَرَدْنَاهُ أَنْ نَقُولَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ

"For to anything which We have willed, We but say, 'Be,' and it is" (*al-Nahl* 40). Similarly, Qutb states, "Allah simply bestowed that word on Mary and Jesus was then created without a father." The same methodology he applied with respect to the phrase "and a spirit proceeding from Him." Qutb argues that this is the same as what is found in the verse,

إِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي خَالِقٌ بَشَرًا مِنْ طِينٍ فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتُهُ وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِي فَقَعُوا لَهُ سَاجِدِينَ

"Behold, the Lord said to the angels, `I am about to create man from clay. When I have fashioned him and breathed into him of My spirit, fall you down in prostration unto him'" (*Saad* 71-72).[1] His interpretations are also supported by another verse found in *soorah ali-Imraan*, verse 59,

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[1]Qutb, *Fi Dhilaal*, vol. 2, p. 817.

إِنَّ مَثَلَ عِيسَى عِنْدَ اللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ آدَمَ خَلَقَهُ مِنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ قَالَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ

"The similitude of Jesus before Allah is as that of Adam, He created him from dust, then said to him, 'Be,' and he was."

The Sunnah as a Source of *Tafseer*

The second most important source of *tafseer* is the sunnah and hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Allah says in the Quran,

وَأَنزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

"And We have revealed unto you (Muhammad) the reminder so you may expound unto mankind that which has been revealed for them. So perchance they may ponder" (*al-Nahl* 44). Al-Albaani writes that this verse has two meanings. First, the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) is not to conceal anything of the revelation that he has received but he must convey all of it to mankind. Second, it means that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) has the duty of explaining the finer details of the Quran and of demonstrating how the Quran is to be applied.[1] Obviously, Allah would not have burdened the Messenger (peace be upon him) with that latter duty unless He also gave the Prophet the necessary knowledge to explain the Quran. Otherwise, "expounding unto mankind what has been revealed" would be an impossible task and Allah does not

[1]See Muhammad Naasir al-Deen al-Albaani, *Manzalat al-Sunnah fi al-Islaam* (Kuwait: al-Daar al-Salafiyyah, 1980), p. 6.

burden any soul beyond what it can bear. Thus the Prophet (peace be upon him), when he spoke or acted, was implementing and explaining the Quran according to the knowledge that Allah had bestowed upon him for that purpose. This was in order for him to fulfill this role of the explainer of the revelation. Hence, whenever the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) explained or applied any verse, this explanation or application was based on Allah's intention or purpose behind the verse, the knowledge of which Allah had vouchsafed upon the Prophet (peace be upon him).

This is one aspect of the verse: the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) must have been given knowledge from Allah to explain, expound and put into practice the Quran. But the verse also states that if anyone truly desires to know what Allah means by any verse in the Quran and how Allah wishes to see the Quran implemented, then, as Allah states, he must look to the sunnah of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him). In the above verse it is stated that this is one of the roles of the Prophet (peace be upon him); he is to explain the Quran to mankind.

Al-Albaani gives many examples wherein the Companions themselves did not understand the intent of the Quran correctly and it was necessary for the Prophet (peace be upon him) to explain the Quran to them.[1] This demonstrates that possessing knowledge of the Arabic language, which the Companions did possess, is not always sufficient for the correct application of the Quran. One must turn to the sunnah to understand the Quran correctly.

For example, Allah says in the Quran,

وَالسَّارِقُ وَالسَّارِقَةُ فَاقْطَعُوا أَيْدِيَهُمَا

"For the male and female thief, cut off their hands" (*al-Maaidah* 38). The one way to know how exactly this verse is

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[1]Ibid., pp. 7-10.

to be applied is by reference to the sunnah of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him). This is because both thief and hand are general terms but, in fact, their general meanings are not what are implied here, as the Prophet (peace be upon him) has demonstrated. The word commonly translated as hand in the above verse, *yad*, in Arabic can imply anything from the hand itself all the way up to the armpit. The Prophet (peace be upon him) has explained, though, that the commandment means that the hand to the wrist is all that is to be cut off. He also showed that not every thief will have his hand cut off, as he stated that the hand is not to be cut off for a theft of something that is valued at less than a quarter of a *dinar*.[1]

Similarly, Allah says in the Quran,

الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَلَمْ يَلْبِسُوا إِيمَانَهُمْ بِظُلْمٍ أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمُ الأَمْنُ وَهُمْ مُهْتَدُونَ

"Those who believe and obscure not their belief by wrongdoing (*dhulm*), theirs is safety; they are rightly guided" (*al-Anaam* 82). The Companions understood the word *dhulm* (translated by Pickthall as "wrongdoing") in a wide sense covering all types of wrongdoing. Hence they questioned who it was who was not guilty of such an act. They asked the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) about it and he told them that this verse did not have the meaning that they suspected. He told them that the word *dhulm* in this case referred to associating partners with Allah and he quoted the Quranic verse, *Luqmaan* 13,

[1]Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim. It is amazing how even those people who claim the sunnah need not be followed will automatically state that the hand of the thief is to be cut from the wrist. They do not realize that this is not what the Quran states but it is how the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) explained the verse.

إِنَّ الشِّرْكَ لَظُلْمٌ عَظِيمٌ

"Verily associating partners with Allah is a great *dhulm*."[1] In this example, the Messenger of Allah had to save the Companions from their distress due to their misunderstanding of the verse.

In another verse, Allah says,

وَإِذَا ضَرَبْتُمْ فِي الأَرْضِ فَلَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ أَنْ تَقْصُرُوا مِنَ الصَّلاةِ إِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَنْ يَفْتِنَكُمْ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا

"And when you go forth in the land, it is no sin upon you if you curtail (your) worship if you fear that those who disbelieve may attack you" (*al-Nisaa* 101). The apparent meaning of this verse is that one may shorten one's prayers while travelling only during occasions in which one fears an attack from the enemies of Islam. This was the meaning that some of the Companions derived from this verse and therefore they went to the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) and asked him how they could possibly continue to shorten their prayers while they were no longer in fear of any enemy. The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) cleared up their misunderstanding and explained to them that the shortening of the prayers while travelling, even if there was no fear, is a charity from Allah and the Muslims should accept His charity.[2] This means that the words of the verse did not imply a conditional action but were simply pointing out one of the actions' most obvious causes.

In another example, Allah says in the Quran,

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[1]Recorded by al-Bukhari, Muslim and others. This shows that Pickthall's translation of *dhulm* as wrongdoing is not proper. According to Abdul Raheem, this example shows that the Prophet (peace be upon him) approved of the use of the Quran as a source of *tafseer*. Abdul Raheem, p. 419.

[2]Recorded by Muslim.

وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا حَتَّى يَتَبَيَّنَ لَكُمُ الْخَيْطُ الأَبْيَضُ مِنَ الْخَيْطِ الأَسْوَدِ مِنَ الْفَجْرِ

"And eat and drink until the white thread becomes distinct from the black thread of the dawn" (*al-Baqarah* 187).[1] After this verse was revealed, a Companion used to keep two threads, one black and one white, under his pillow and checked to see if he could distinguish between the two at the appropriate time of dawn. The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) heard about this and he remarked that this Companion must have a very large pillow as the verse is referring to the differentiation between the white streak of the dawn and that of the night.[2]

The above examples should be sufficient to render the point clear. They demonstrate that knowledge of the Arabic language is not sufficient to completely or correctly understand the Quran. Indeed, even knowledge of the other verses of the Quran is not sufficient to interpret all of the Quran. One must also look to the deeds and statements of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) and how he applied the Quran to correctly understand the Quran. One cannot possibly do without his sunnah. The Companions of the Messenger were all fluent in Arabic yet they, at times, misunderstood the real meaning of certain verses. In the above examples there was no possible way for the Companions to know the exact nature of the verse, how general or how specific it is and what exactly it is referring to without the aid of the Prophet (peace be upon him).

There are many other verses in the Quran whose true import could not possibly be known without looking to what

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[1]When this verse was first revealed, the words, "of the dawn" were not present as part of the verse.
[2]Recorded by Muslim.

the Prophet (peace be upon him) said about such verses. For example, Allah says in the Quran,

حُرِّمَتْ عَلَيْكُمْ الْمَيْتَةُ وَالدَّمُ وَلَحْمُ الْخِنْزِيرِ

"Forbidden unto you are carrion and blood and swine flesh" (*al-Maaidah* 3). The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) explained to the Muslim nation that two types of blood are allowable as well as two types of carrion. The Prophet (peace be upon him) explained that the liver and the spleen are allowed although they contain blood. Also, the meat from the ocean and locusts are allowed without any necessary slaughtering. Without the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) expounding upon this verse, the Muslims would deny themselves some of the good things that Allah has, in fact, made lawful for them.

Allah says,

قُلْ لا أَجِدُ فِي مَا أُوحِيَ إِلَيَّ مُحَرَّمًا عَلَى طَاعِمٍ يَطْعَمُهُ إِلاَّ أَنْ يَكُونَ مَيْتَةً أَوْ دَمًا مَسْفُوحًا أَوْ لَحْمَ خِنْزِيرٍ

"Say: I find not in that which is revealed to me anything prohibited to an eater that he may eat except if it be carrion or blood poured forth or swine flesh" (*Al-Anaam* 145). In addition to these, the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) has prohibited other types of food. For example, he prohibited the flesh of donkeys, which was not mentioned by Allah in this verse.

In general, one can see that it was only the Prophet (peace be upon him) who implemented the principles to be mentioned below. In fact, it could have only been the Prophet who could have implemented these principles as they require certain knowledge that rests only with the One who revealed the Quran, Allah.

The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) explained the general and specific ordinances of the Quran,

as in the case of the word *dhulm* above which has only a specific meaning in that particular verse and does not imply its general meaning.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) explained the details of the Quranic ordinances. For example, Allah orders the Muslims to pray but Allah never explains exactly how this prayer is to be performed. The answer to the question of how to pray is not explicitly found in the Quran but the Messenger of Allah answered it by saying,

صَلُّوا كَمَا رَأَيْتُمُونِي أُصَلِّي

"Pray as you see me pray."[1] Another example is the verse, mentioned above, concerning the thief and the cutting off of his hand.

The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) also explained the meaning of the terms that do not have a clear and specific reference in the Quran. For example, as noted earlier, in *soorah al-Faatiha*, the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) explained that those whose portion is wrath refers to the Jews while those who have gone astray refers to the Christians. This particular reference cannot be known by a look at the verse itself but since the Prophet (peace be upon him) explained it, it is clear that it is they who the verse is referring to.

Furthermore, the Messenger of Allah added some ordinances to those found in the Quran, for example, the permissibility of the two types of blood and carrion or the prohibition of donkey flesh (both of these examples have been discussed above).

In addition, by his actions and statements the Muslims are able to identify which of the Quranic verses have been abrogated and which have not been abrogated.

[1]Recorded by al-Bukhari.

Finally, the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) stressed and emphasized the meanings of many of the verses of the Quran with his own statements; that is, many of his statements have the same meaning as some verses of the Quran and they simply emphasize the meaning of the verse.

The functions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) with respect to the Quran may, therefore, be summarized as follows:

(1) Explaining the general and specific ordinances, specifying many of the general commands, of the Quran.[1]

(2) Explaining the details and applications of the Quranic commandments or prohibitions.

Concerning these first two aspects of the Prophet's (peace be upon him) roles vis-a-vis the Quran, Maudoodi wrote,

> The Quran, to put it succinctly, is a Book of broad general principles rather than of legal minutiae.[2] The Book's aim is to expound, clearly and adequately, the intellectual and moral foundations of the Islamic programme for life. It seeks to consolidate these by appealing both to man's mind and to his heart. Its method of guidance for practical Islamic life does not consist of laying down minutely detailed laws and regulations. It prefers to outline the basic framework for each aspect of human activity, and to lay down certain guidelines within which man can order his life in keeping with the Will of God. The mission of the Prophet was to give practical shape to the Islamic vision of the good life, by offering the world a model of an individual character and of a human state and society, as

[1]For more examples of this nature, see Abdul Raheem, p. 409.

[2] This statement by Maudoodi can be considered correct in a general sense; obviously, there are numerous exceptions to that general description in the Quran.

living embodiments of the principles of the Quran.[1]

(3) Giving the exact meaning of some phrases whose meanings were ambiguous or had many possible meanings.[2]

(4) Giving additional ordinances and regulations that are not to be found in the Quran but which make up part of the religion of Islam.

(5) Clarifying which verses are abrogated and which are not.

(6) Emphasizing and stressing, by his own speech, the meanings of numerous Quranic verses.

There is yet other evidence from the Quran that proves that the Muslim must look to the Messenger of Allah's (peace be upon him) sunnah to truly see how to live according to the Quran. There is no question that the way of life expounded by Allah in the Quran is the straight path, the way of life that is pleasing to Allah. At the same time, Allah states,

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِمَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُو اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الآخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا

"Verily in the Messenger of Allah you have an excellent example for him who looks unto Allah and the Last Day and remembers Allah much" (*al-Ahzaab* 21). When Allah declares that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) is the best example for Muslims to follow, this is a declaration from Allah that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) is following the straight path, the path that is pleasing to Allah. Or, in other words, it means that the way of life or sunnah of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) is the

[1]Maudoodi, *An Introduction*, p. 44.

[2]Al-Suyooti has a long section containing the Prophet's *tafseer* of specific words and phrases in the Quran. See al-Suyooti, pp. 244-263. Also see Abdul Raheem, pp. 411-414.

same way of life that is according to the teachings of the Quran. In essence, Allah is telling the believers, "If you wish to see how to properly and best apply the Quran, look to the example of the Messenger of Allah." This thought was echoed by the Prophet's wife Aishah who, as noted earlier, when asked about the Prophet's character, replied, "His character was the Quran."[1] In essence, the Prophet (peace be upon him) was the practical application of the Quran, "a walking Quran" as some people have called him.

Allah also states,

وَإِنَّكَ لَتَهْدِي إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ صِرَاطِ اللَّهِ الَّذِي لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الأَرْضِ أَلاَ إِلَى اللَّهِ تَصِيرُ الأُمُورُ

"And verily you (O Muhammad) do guide (men) to the straight way— the Way of Allah to whom belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on earth. Behold how all affairs tend towards Allah" (*al-Shoora* 52-53); and Allah states,

كَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا فِيكُمْ رَسُولاً مِنكُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْكُمْ آيَاتِنَا وَيُزَكِّيكُمْ وَيُعَلِّمُكُمْ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَيُعَلِّمُكُمْ مَا لَمْ تَكُونُوا تَعْلَمُونَ

"A similar (favor have you already received) in that We have sent among you a messenger of your own, rehearsing to you Our signs, and purifying you and instructing you in Scripture and Wisdom, and that which you knew not" (*al-Baqarah* 151).[2]

In *al-Shoora* 52-53 quoted above, Allah pronounces that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) guides to

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[1] Recorded by Muslim.

[2] Verses similar to this last verse may be found in *ali-Imraan* 164 and *al-Jumuah* 2.

the straight path. In the Quran, it states that the straight path is the path expounded by the Quran itself. Hence, both the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) and the Quran are showing and guiding Muslims to one and the same straight path that leads to Allah's pleasure. Hence, they must both be consistent with one another and both of them must be taken together as guides.

Moreover, commenting on the verse from *al-Baqarah*, verse 151, Habib-ur-Rahman Azami writes,

> In all three verses above[1], two things are distinctively and separately mentioned. Firstly [*sic*] recitation of the revelations, and secondly the teachings of the Book. [*sic*]
>
> The meaning of the first, 'recitation' of the Book, is clear. But the second, the 'teaching' of the Book, requires some elucidation. If the expression denoted the reading (aloud) of the Quran in a systematic manner, making people commit it to memory, there was no need to specify it as something different from 'recitation'. It evidently, therefore, signifies the explanation and interpretation of the Quranic verses and the exposition of their meaning, wisdom and commands.
>
> It is thus apparent from the Quran itself that just as direct recitation and preaching of the Divine revelations are part of the Prophetic duties of the Prophet, so too are their exposition and interpretation. It follows logically that the text of the Quran is binding and absolute. As is its interpretation, as provided by the Prophet. Otherwise - it would have been meaningless to charge him with the teaching of the Book and

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[1]That is, *al-Baqara* 151, *ali-Imraan* 164 and *al-Jumuah* 2.

> make it part of his Prophetic mission. In sum, on the basis of these Quranic statements, the Prophet is not only the Messenger of Allah but also the teacher and interpreter of the Divine message.[1]

From all of the above it should become clear that the correct understanding of the Quran cannot be achieved without reference to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and the manner in which he applied the Quran. This is why all of the scholars of Quranic exegesis are in agreement that the first source of attaining the meaning of the verses of the Quran is other relevant verses of the Quran itself. The second source is, undoubtedly, the sayings and actions of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) as, indeed, it was one of his roles that he should explain the Quran and put it into practice in the exact manner in which it was meant to be put into practice. Saeed ibn Jubair was absolutely correct when, after he related some hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him), a man came to him and said, "In the Book of Allah is something that differs from what you have said." Saeed replied, "The Messenger of Allah knows the Book of Allah much better than you do!" Indeed, the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) knows the Book of Allah better than anyone of this creation and anyone who claims to know it or understand it better than the Prophet (peace be upon him) is, in fact, an apostate.

Therefore, two very important sources of *tafseer* have now been established. It is not allowed for any explanation of a verse to contradict either of these two sources. This is true because both of these sources come directly from Allah and no one knows the Book of Allah better than the one who revealed it. These are the two definitive sources of *tafseer* that may not be contradicted by

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[1]Habib-ur-Rahman Azami, *The Sunnah in Islam: The Eternal Relevance of the Teaching and Example of the Prophet Muhammad* (Leicester, United Kingdom: UK Islamic Academy, 1989), p. 9.

personal reasoning or *ijtihaad*. Abdul Raheem has succinctly concluded,

> It is established that whatever the Prophet (peace be upon him) stated in interpreting the Quran and explaining what Allah's words mean was based on revelation and what Allah had imprinted on his heart of understanding and what he was exclusively given of knowledge and erudition. In fact, Allah obliged him to explain the Quran and expound the meanings of His words.... Therefore it is absolutely necessary for anyone who interprets the Quran to base his interpretation upon what has been narrated of its interpretation by the Messenger (peace be upon him) and not to deviate from it and turn to *ijtihaad* and personal judgment by looking at the Arabic wording to determine its meaning.[1]

The Companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) as a Source of *Tafseer*

It is generally accepted by scholars that the Prophet (peace be upon him) did not explain every verse of the Quran to the Companions in the sense that he did not actually discuss every verse; however, he did explain every verse in the sense that he put each verse into practice before their very eyes. The reasons the Prophet (peace be upon him) did not verbally explain every verse are obvious. His Companions were living at a time when the people excelled in their knowledge of the Arabic language. Extensive knowledge of Arabic was something individual Arabs would boast about during the time of *jaahiliyya*. Hence, the

[1]Abdul Raheem, p. 415.

meaning of most verses of the Quran were quite clear to the Companions because of their excellent command of the Arabic language, with no need for the Prophet (peace be upon him) to explain the verses to them.[1] Furthermore, the Companions witnessed many of the events the Quran refers to. They witnessed with their eyes what the Quran was talking about and, in most cases, they did not need anyone to tell them, "This verse refers to that and such and such verse refers to this occasion." Therefore, a great deal of knowledge concerning the Quran was known but was left unstated during the Messenger of Allah's (peace be upon him) time.

There are yet other important characteristics of the Companions that set them apart from all others who came later and ventured to interpret the Quran. These important characteristics include the following among others:[2]

First, as noted above, they witnessed the Prophet's (peace be upon him) implementation of the Quran and, in addition, if any verse of the Quran was not clear to them, they could go directly to the Prophet (peace be on him) and ask him about the meaning of the verse. This aspect is probably much more important than how people perceive it. In essence, the Companions were shown how to apply and understand the Quran by the only one with such authority. They could know for certain that their application and understanding of the Quran was the correct one.

This characteristic can perhaps be better understood with an analogy with today's computer software. An expert in a particular software could hand another person some software and its manual and let the person fend for himself and discover on his own how to use the software. The latter

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[1] Mention was already made of those verses which prove an exception to this general statement. In the previously mentioned verses, the meanings were not clear to the Companions except by the guidance of the Prophet (peace be upon him).

[2] These and others are discussed in more detail in the author's *The Methodologies of the Quranic Commentators*, pp. 64-70.

person will, in most cases, have to go through some trial and error first before really learning the software. Many times he will not be certain if the results of what he is doing will be correct. On the other hand, the expert could sit down with the novice and teach him step by step how to use the software. In addition to that, he can sit next to the novice while the novice is using the software and any time the novice has a question, he can readily answer it for him. The example of the novice with just the manual could be considered similar to the people who came after the Companions with respect to the Quran. And the example of the novice with the teacher by his side is the case of the Companions who were personally taught, directed and counseled by the Prophet (peace be on him) himself concerning the meaning and proper application of the Quran.

According to al-Sid, this was their greatest advantage. He wrote,

> The most distinctive advantage of Muhammad's contemporaries was not their unparalleled excellence in Arabic or their unmistakable intuitive capability or their being the first addressees of the revelation, but the existence, in their midst, of an exemplary embodiment of the Quranic message and an authorized hermeneutical source as Prophet Muhammad was. Inspite [*sic*] of the many advantages they enjoyed, the Muslims could, without Muhammad, have gone to extremes in their religiosity and in the whole gamut of their political and social functions. But, Muhammad guided their understanding of the message, curbed their extravagance and step by step directed them to the Godly pattern in which they could mold themselves and the whole *ummah*. We have seen how he utilized

> every possible means to explain to them the revelation, to show them the right course of action and instructed them in what he suspected to be a hindrance to understanding. He labored hard to remove every obstacle—political, social or psychological— from their understanding of the Quran. In brief, there was a Word of God coming and a Prophet with a historical strength of character and devotion, guiding their understanding and response to it...
>
> Prophet Muhammad, with that absolutely unique capacity and status as a divinely appointed hermeneutician to communicate the understanding of the Word of God to men, was there with the first Muslims. They could talk to him, observe him and keep a close look on him; for it was their assurance that they were truly grasping the meaning of the Word of God.[1]

Second, they were people of *imaan* (true faith) and correct understanding. They embraced Islam and learned Islam over time— especially the early converts to Islam. Hence, they could understand the Quran as it was being revealed. They had a firm grasp of the basics of Islam and therefore it was easy for them to understand verses that later generations quibbled about in some detail. Commenting on this point, al-Sid wrote,

> The hermeneutical situation in Islam is a simple as this: If the real understanding of

1 Muhammad Al-Sid, "The Hermeneutical Problem of the Quran in Islamic History," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Temple University, 1975), pp. 236-238.

God, veracity of the Quran and the apostleship of Muhammad is well established, the possibility of a hermeneutical problem on any lower level is greatly diminished. And if all or any of them is misunderstood or ignored in the understanding of the Quran, even in the least detail, the whole process of understanding is in jeopardy. *This is why it can be maintained here that not only because of their intuitive capability or mastery of the Arabic language, as is usually maintained, that the first Muslims had the least problem in their excellent grasp of the Quran, but mainly because that hermeneutical methodology was strictly and carefully followed in their understanding.* Like other people, many questions had risen in their minds but found a quick and very satisfying answer in their real comprehension of the above realities. None of them, scaffolding, questioning and hard of belief as they used to be, is reported to us as asking a question that is impliedly questioning God's omnipotence or absolute justice. One of them may see with his own eyes that a child is burning to death; a question may immediately spring to his mind: What did this poor child do? He may not know the answer, but his mind is basically assured of God's justice so much so that if the full reality of the incident is disclosed, the absolute justice and mercy of God are certain. The idea that the Red Sea was cleaved or that Jesus was born of a virgin may arouse his wonder, but never his doubt that it was God in his omnipotence and great wisdom who caused such things to happen. It is not possible to say that they did not possess a critical mind as that

> of the twentieth century man; - for the Quran reports some of them, before they acquire an understanding of God, as expressing a similar skepticism to that of the twentieth century man. One of them brought a decayed bone, smashed it in his hand and said: "Who can resurrect these decayed bones and how?" To answer him, the Quran did not indulge into any scientific explanation of how such feat could be actualized. Rather, it gave a more rational and comprehensive answer. It confirmed the absolute omnipotence of God. For if faith in this is secured, it would be irrational to raise the question...[1]

After the Prophet's (peace be upon him) death, new people began to embrace Islam, increasing the number of Muslims who had not lived during the Prophet's (peace be upon him) time. Many of these people were not familiar with the details of the Prophet's (peace be upon him) life and many of them were also non-Arabs whose familiarity with the Arabic language of the Quran was limited. This meant that the Companions were then forced to speak more about the Quran, to explain the meaning of its verses to these newcomers. This could be called the beginning of what was later to be known as the "Science of *Tafseer*."

Furthermore, due to the political strength of Islam at that time, people whose hearts were not sincere to Allah (called *zanaadiqa*) began to embrace Islam during the First Century of the Hijra as they realized that they could not fight Islam from without. These people attempted to incorrectly interpret the Quran in order to lead others away from the true path of Islam. Similarly, some people lacking in knowledge, although sincere, began to give incorrect interpretations to

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1 Al-Sid, pp. 147-148. Emphasis his.

the Quran based on their opinions. It was also the responsibility of those Companions, who lived long enough to witness such events, to counter them by offering the correct meaning or *tafseer* of the Quran.

This early phenomenon led the later scholars to ask the question, "How much weight or authority is to be given to the *tafseer* or explanation of a Quranic verse that comes, not from the Prophet (peace be upon him), but from one of the Companions? Is it to be considered an absolute authority in the science of *tafseer* or not?" There is not much difference of opinion among the scholars of *tafseer* when it comes to answering this question. This is probably due to a number of reasons, among them the overall status of the Companions in Islam as demonstrated by the Quran and hadith, the well-known practice of the Companions of not speaking about the Quran without definite knowledge, their excellent knowledge of Arabic, their excellent knowledge of the customs of the Arabs before the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him)[1] and the fact that they witnessed and lived the events the Quran refers to.

Many scholars even consider their commentary at the same level as *marfoo* (مرفوع)[2], as was the opinion of al-Haakim and (according to al-Haakim) the opinion of al-Bukhari and Muslim, especially when it comes to their comments about *asbaab al-nuzool*[3], things which they witnessed and things related to matters concerning which there is no room for personal judgment (such as their explanation of verses concerning what will happen on the Day of Judgment, in heaven and so on). And, in fact, al-Zarkashi even states that their commentary related to matters

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[1]This knowledge is important because many verses in the Quran refer to the practices of the Arabs before Islam.

[2]*Marfoo*, in this instance, means something that originates with the Prophet (peace be upon him) himself and, therefore, has the same status as the rest of his sunnah.

[3]The events surrounding a specific revelation.

of Arabic— that is, matters they did not hear directly from the Prophet (peace be upon him)— takes precedence over the commentaries of others because of the Companions' excellence in Arabic.[1] Similarly, ibn Taimiyyah states that after the Quran and sunnah, the statements of the Companions is the third source of Quranic commentary since they witnessed the revelation and since their sincere intentions and sound knowledge are confirmed in the Quran.[2]

To be more precise, the place of the Companions in the science of Quranic commentary must be discussed by dividing the topic into six separate categories:[3]

First, the way the Companions implemented, understood and explained the Quran during the Messenger of Allah's (peace be upon him) lifetime, with his knowledge and approval, is a definite source and authority (Ar., *hujja*) in *tafseer* and may not be denied by any later commentator on the Quran. Hence, if any Companion or later scholar narrated that "this is how the Companions understood and applied that verse during the time of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him)," that explanation or application of the verse must be considered valid and correct. In fact, this actually is considered part of the sunnah of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) because what he tacitly approved is considered part of his sunnah according to the legal theorists.

Second, what the Companions narrated concerning *asbaab al-nuzool*— explicitly stating that such and such verse was revealed in reference to such and such an incident and means such and such— is to be considered *marfoo* and an authority (*hujjah* حجة) having the status very similar to

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[1]Al-Zarkashi, vol. 2, p. 172.
[2]Ibn Taimiyyah, *Muqaddimah*, pp. 42-43.
[3]Some of these categories have not been discussed by the scholars since such scholars were mostly concerned only with the statements of the Companions.

that of the hadith of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) himself.[1]

Third, the Companions' understanding and application of the general or broad concepts of the Quran is considered, without any doubt, a *hujja* or overriding authority. That is, for example, their understanding of the relationship between faith and actions, the place and importance of jihad in Islam, the importance of spreading Islam, the importance and obligation of ordering good and eradicating evil, their understanding of the foundations of Islam, the place of the Quran and sunnah in Islam, the relationship between believers and disbelievers, and so on, are all considered *hujja* or authoritative because there is no doubt that they attained such understandings and application directly from the guidance of the Prophet (peace be upon him) himself who brought them up in Islam. The Companions learned these aspects from the Prophet (peace be upon him) himself and they form the correct and only valid expression of Islam. This point is reinforced by the hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him) in which he stated that the Muslim nation would split up into seventy-three groups and that all of them would be in the Hell-fire save the group that follows what he and his companions were following.[2]

Fourth, the matters related to *tafseer* concerning which the Companions were in agreement must also be considered authoritative in *tafseer*. This is true not only due to the status of the Companions but also because of the authority of *ijmaa* (consensus) in Islamic law.

Fifth, in some matters concerning *tafseer*, the Companions held differing opinions. In most cases, as ibn

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[1]On this point, one must carefully consider the wording of the Companion. Saying that a verse was revealed in reference to something is not the same as saying that it was revealed because of that thing.

[2] Recorded by al-Tirmidhi. According to al-Albaani, it is *hasan*. See al-Albaani, *Saheeh al-Jaami*, vol. 2, pp. 943-944.

Taimiyyah points out[1], the differences were not contradictory; usually one Companion would mention one facet or application of a verse while another would mention another without any contradiction between the two.[2] In cases like these, where there is no contradiction, all of the interpretations are accepted as valid.

Sixth, there are some cases where the Companions made contradictory *ijtihaad* or personal judgments concerning how specific verses are to applied or understood. In such cases, the different opinions need to be studied and weighed against one another in the light of the Quran and the sunnah and the strongest opinion is to be accepted and followed.

The Companions passed on their knowledge of the Quran to their students of the following generation, known as the *tabieen*. Although the statements of the *tabieen* ("the Followers") concerning *tafseer* definitely do not hold the same rank or status as that of the Companions, it is highly recommended to consult their statements also because, in many cases, the source of their knowledge in *tafseer* was the Companions.[3]

Commenting on the place of the Followers in *tafseer*, ibn Taimiyyah wrote,

> Shu'bah ibn al-Hajjaaj and others have said, "The statements of the Followers hold no authority in matters of practical rules (*furoo'*); so how can they have an authority in *tafseer*?" That is, their statements are not authorities over others who differ from them. That is correct. But when they

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[1]Ibn Taimiya, pp. 38-55.

[2]Such as interpreting "the straight path" as meaning Islam, the Quran, the way of the sunnah and so on. These are all non-contradictory statements and the Quranic phrase applies to all of them.

[3]This is especially true in the case of Mujaahid, for example, who stated that he read the entire Quran to the Companion ibn Abbaas and asked him the meaning of each verse in the Quran.

> agree on a matter, it undoubtedly becomes an authority. However, if they differ, the views of one will have no authority over the others nor over those who come after them. In such cases, one must turn to the language of the Quran or the sunnah, or the Arabic language in general, or the statements of the companions on that matter.[1]

Abdul Qaadir Al-Arnaaoot points out that if the Companions and Followers are agreed as to the meaning or interpretation of a particular verse, there is no room for others to present a new interpretation for the verse. He gives the example of the phrase, "in the cause of Allah," in the following verse concerning the distribution of zakat:

إِنَّمَا الصَّدَقَاتُ لِلْفُقَرَاءِ وَالْمَسَاكِينِ وَالْعَامِلِينَ عَلَيْهَا وَالْمُؤَلَّفَةِ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَفِي الرِّقَابِ وَالْغَارِمِينَ وَفِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَابْنِ السَّبِيلِ فَرِيضَةً مِنَ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ

"[The obligatory] alms are for the poor and the needy, and those employed to administer the (funds); for those whose hearts have been (recently) reconciled (to the truth); for those in bondage and in debt; in the cause of Allah; and for the wayfarer. (Thus is it) ordained by Allah, and Allah is full of knowledge and wisdom" (*al-Taubah* 60). The early scholars agreed that "in the cause of Allah" means for either jihad or pilgrimage. None of them offered any other interpretation. Hence, that interpretation must be followed.[2]

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[1]Ibn Taimiya, p. 105.

[2] Abdul Qaadir al-Arnaaoot, p. 7. He further states that if the interpretation of some later scholars is followed, that "in the cause of Allah" implies any type of good deed or general welfare, there would have been no point in specifying the eight categories mentioned in the verse. This topic that al-Arnaaoot was able to quickly sweep aside in one paragraph is a hotly debated issue among many jurists and economists today. For example, in the preceedings from the "1988 Conference on Contemporary Issues of

The Arabic Language and *Tafseer*

Anyone who attempts to interpret the Quran must be skilled in the Arabic language. Imam Malik once said, "If anyone who is not knowledgeable of the Arabic language tries to interpret the Book of Allah, it will only make of him an exemplary punishment."[1] And Mujaahid, the famous student of the Companion ibn Abbaas, stated, "It is not permissible for anyone who believes in Allah and the Last Day to speak about the Book of Allah if he is not knowledgeable of the dialects of the Arabs."[2]

Zakat," Umar al-Ashqar devotes about ninety pages to the question of the meaning of "in the cause of Allah" in the above verse (in a paper that has also been published as a separate book). After a detailed study of the meaning of the phrase in numerous verses and hadith, the conclusion he came to is in agreement with what al-Arnaaoot stated that "in the cause of Allah" means jihad. Unfortunately, though, al-Ashqar did not do the same kind of research concerning the meaning of the word "jihad" in the texts of the Quran and sunnah and statements of early scholars. Thereby, he concluded, following al-Qaradhaawi's lead, that jihad refers to everything that strengthens the Muslims and, hence, zakat can be given to numerous endeavors, all in the name of "jihad." [Cf., Umar al-Ashqar, "*Mashmoolaat Masrif fi Sabeel Allah bi-Nadhrah Muaasirah Hasab al-Itibaaraat al-Mukhtalifah*" in *Abhaath wa Amaal: Al-Nadwah al-Oola li-Qadhaayaa al-Zakaah al-Muaasirah* (Kuwait: Bait al-Zakaah, 1988), pp. 179-261; reprinted as Umar al-Ashqar, *Mashmoolaat Masrif fi Sabeel Allah* (Jordan: Daar al-Nafaais, 1995), *passim*.] This goes against the basic understanding of the word "jihad" as it occurs in the text of the Quran and sunnah and statements of the jurists, as Muhammad Haikal has conclusively demonstrated in his doctoral dissertation on jihad. The primary meaning of jiad in these texts is the "fighting against the disbelievers in order to make the law of Allah supreme." That is the primary meaning in such texts and one cannot diverge from that primary meaning to a secondary usage unless there is evidence to do so. Cf., Muhammad Haikal, *Al-Jihaad wa al-Qitaal fi al-Siyyaasah al-Shariyyah* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Kulliyat al-Imaam al-Auzaai li-l-Dirasaat al-Islaamiyah), vol. 1, pp. 40-44.

[1]Recorded by al-Baihaqi in *al-Shuab*.

[2]Quoted in Abdul Raheem, p. 404. Also see Ibraaheem al-Shaatibi, *al-Muwaafiqaat fi Usool al-Shareeah* (Beirut: Daar al-Marifa, n.d.), vol. 2, pp. 64-66.

At numerous places in the Quran, Allah mentions that the Quran was revealed in the Arabic language. For example, Allah states,

إِنَّا أَنزَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ

"Verily We have sent it down as an Arabic Quran in order that you may understand" (*Yoosuf* 2).[1] Furthermore, it has been recognized that the Quran is the most eloquent and proper Arabic, never contradicting any principle of the Arabic language.[2] Consequently, any interpretation of any verse in the Quran must be consistent with the Arabic structure and meaning of its words. Any interpretation that cannot be substantiated by the Arabic language or which contradicts the principles of Arabic is invalid and must be rejected.

The Quran was not only revealed in Arabic but it was revealed in the Arabic language of the Prophet's (peace be upon him) time. Allah says,

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ رَسُولٍ إِلاَّ بِلِسَانِ قَوْمِهِ لِيُبَيِّنَ لَهُمْ

"And We sent not a messenger except with the language of his people in order that he might make (the Message) clear for them" (*Ibraaheem* 4). Some people fail to realize the importance of this condition. Languages and meanings of words change over time.[3] For example, during the Messenger of Allah's (peace be upon him) time, the word

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[1]Other verses that mention that the Quran is in Arabic include *Taha* 113, *al-Zukhruf* 3, *al-Shoora* 7 and *al-Shuaraa* 192-195.

[2]Abdul Raheem, p. 41. Ibn Faaris stated that the eloquence and excellent language of the Quraish is one reason why the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) was chosen from among them. Abdul Raheem, p. 43.

[3]By the grace of Allah and through the effect of the miraculous Quran, Arabic has been preserved with very few changes since the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Of the different languages of the earlier prophets mentioned in the Quran, Arabic is the only living language.

harf meant a complete word while today it is almost universally used by Arabs to denote single letters. Similarly, *kalimah* meant a complete sentence during that time while today it is used to mean individual words.

Bilal Philips noted an example of this nature, where a phrase in the Quran has not been understood in its original sense, and how it can lead to misguided conclusions supposedly derived from the Quran,

> Yusuf Ali openly translated the word "*Burooj*" used in the 85th Soorah as "the Zodiacal signs" while Pickthall translated it as Mansions of the Stars but says in his introduction to the Soorah that it is applied to the signs of the zodiac. Thus, according to them, Allah is making an oath by the zodiacal signs. Some English-speaking Muslims have taken this to be an indirect support of astrology. However, *Burooj* originally only meant star configuration and it was not until later times that it was used to refer to the imaginary figures of the zodiac which pagan Babylonians and Greeks superimposed on them. In fact, astrology has been forbidden by the Prophet (peace be upon him) in no uncertain terms...[1]

The principle that any interpretation of the Quran must be consistent with the Arabic language of the Prophet's (peace be upon him) time seems simple and obvious enough but, in fact, much of the deviations that have appeared over the years in Quranic commentaries[2] have been due to explaining the Quran in such a way that is not compatible with the Arabic language.[3] Sometimes it is not clear if this is out of ignorance or is done intentionally.

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[1]Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips, *Tafseer of Soorah al-Hujuraat* (Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, 1989), p. 30.

[2]Mostly by the people of the heretical sects.

[3]Muhammad Asad's explanation of the Quran has a number of interpretations that are inconsistent with the Arabic of the Quran. For two

The Mutazila sect believed that anyone who committed a major sin and did not repent from it would be in the Hell-Fire forever and they do not believe in the intercession of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Therefore, they interpret "people of *kabaa-ir*"[1] as the believers who perform the prayers because Allah says in the Quran,

وَاسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ وَإِنَّهَا لَكَبِيرَةٌ إِلَّا عَلَى الْخَاشِعِينَ

"Seek help in patience and prayer and truly it is hard (Ar., *kabeera*) save for the humble" (*al-Baqarah* 45).[2] This interpretation goes against the principles of the Arabic language; there is no way that *kabeerah* could be construed to refer to the same as *ahl al-kabaa-ir*.[3]

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examples, see the author's "On Abdullah Yusuf Ali's and Muhammad Asad's Commentaries," *al-Basheer* (Vol. 3, No. 5, Jan.-Feb. 1990), p. 10.

[1]Which the *ahl al-sunnah* take as meaning "those people who commit great sins."

[2]This example was mentioned by Muhammad ibn Ismaaeel al-Sanaani, *Irshaad al-Nuqaad ila Taiseer al-Ijtihaad* in *Majmuaat al-Rasaail al-Munairiya* (Cairo: Al-Munairiya, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 39.

[3]Most obvious is the case of the Batiniya and some Sufi groups who totally ignore the obvious, grammatically correct, exoteric meaning of the verses and claim to follow the inner or secret esoteric meanings of the verses, although their esoteric explanations almost always contradict the Arabic wording of the Quran. They were, in fact, forced to take this approach or make such claims because their beliefs were completely anti-Islamic and inconsistent with the Quran. For example, some of them claimed that *wudhu* (ablution) means "having loyalty to the imam." Safa and Marwa, the two mounts that form part of the rites of the pilgrimage, represent to them the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and Imam Ali. Paradise means being free from any obligations while the Hell-fire implies being bound by obligations. Zakat means to purify one's self. (See Abdul Raheem, p. 450.) Similarly Bahaullah, the founder of the Bahai movment, claimed that the Quranic terms *siraat* (path), zakat, *siyaam* (fasting), *hajj* (pilgrimage) and Kaaba do not mean their literal meanings but instead simply refer to the imams. They interpret paradise as a spiritual life and

As just alluded to, incorrect use of Arabic language has been one of the main ways by which the heretical sects have introduced their own concepts into the world of the Quran. Two notable recent examples are the Qadianis and Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam. Commenting on these two groups, Philips wrote,

> The Qadiyani sect which appeared in more recent times in India during the latter part of the nineteenth century, claimed that in the verse, "Muhammad is not the father of any of you but he is Allah's messenger and the seal (*khaatam*) of the Prophets"[1], *khaatam* does not mean last as most understand it but superior. The meaning of the verse, therefore, becomes 'The most superior of the prophets (but not the last)'. They also assert that the word *khaatam* means "seal". That is, he sets a seal on people and with his seal one becomes a prophet. These interpretations were made to validate the claim to prophethood made by their founder, Ghulam Ahmad...
>
> Even more recently in America, Elijah Muhammad (d. 1976), founder of the Elijan sect and claimant to prophethood interpreted the verse, "On the day when the trumpet is blown We will assemble the criminals blue-eyed,"[2] as proof that the inhabitants of the fire will be all white people.[3] This interpretation was used to support

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hell as a spiritual death. (See Abdul Raheem, p. 451.) Similar examples can be given from the books of some Shiahs (see Ibn Qutaiba, pp. 71-72).

[1] *Al-Ahzaab* 40.

[2] *Taha* 102.

[3] The reader will note that this is also another example of someone using part of the Quran to prove what he wants to prove while ignoring other verses. Using the same line of reasoning as the above argument, a white supremacist could argue that all the inhabitants of the Hell-fire will be black people and he could quote the verse, "And on the Day of Resurrection you will see those who lied against Allah, their faces will be

> the Elijan doctrine that Allah, God, was a black man, that all black people were gods and that all white people were devils. Although the word *Zarq* literally means blue, it was used to refer to the clouding of the cornea due to certain eye diseases which gives the eye a bluish-gray tinge. Hence, a more accurate translation would have been "bleary-eyed"...[1]

An extremely important aspect of the use of the Arabic language in *tafseer* is its use as a means of getting a deeper understanding of the meanings of the verses. It is this deeper understanding that is often very difficulty to convey in translations, especially those without any commentary to them. Many examples of this nature could be cited but here only one will be given here.

Allah says in the Quran,

إِنَّا هَدَيْنَاهُ السَّبِيلَ إِمَّا شَاكِرًا وَإِمَّا كَفُورًا

This verse, *al-Insaan* 3, was translated in the manner below in their respective translations: "We showed him the Way: whether he be grateful or ungrateful (rests on his will)."[2] "Verily, We showed him the way, whether he be grateful or

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black. Is there not in Hell an abode for the arrogant" (*al-Zumar* 60), or the verse, "On the Day when some faces will be white, and some faces will be black: to those whose faces will be black, (will be said): 'Did ye reject Faith after accepting it? Taste then the Penalty for rejecting Faith'" (*ali-Imraan* 106). If one puts together all of the verses of the Quran and hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him) one recognizes that skin color has nothing to do with a person's entrance into Paradise or Hell. A person of any skin color will be entered into Paradise by Allah's leave if he were believing and pious and a person of any skin color will be entered into Hell if he were disbelieving or impious.

[1]Philips, p. 33.

[2] A. Yusuf Ali, *The Glorious Quran: Translation and Commentary* (American Trust Publications, 1977), p. 1655.

ungrateful."[1] "Indeed, We guided him to the way, be he grateful or be he ungrateful."[2]

However, the verse would probably better be translated as: "Verily, We showed him [man] the way, whether he be grateful or very ungrateful" (*al-Insaan* 3). This translation is preferred because the word for ungrateful is in the intensive while that for thankful is not, as is clear from the Arabic construct. Recognizing this Arabic construct gives a powerful meaning to the verse: no matter how grateful a person is to Allah, compared with all the blessings that he has received from Allah, the most that he could be called is grateful, but not extremely grateful in comparison to the gifts and mercy he has received. However, with all of the bounties that a person has received, if he is ungrateful to Allah, then he is not just being slightly ungrateful but, by definition, he is being extremely ungrateful. That explains the differences in the two words of this verse and this conclusion can easily be arrived at from the Arabic text but may be obscured by a translation into any other language.[3]

Finally, it must be stressed, although it was alluded to earlier, that no one can rely simply on this source of *tafseer* to derive the correct meaning of the Quran. Abdul Raheem notes,

> Relying solely on the Arabic language for *tafseer* of the Quran is not sufficient. Therefore, it is a definite must for the commentator to refer first

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1 Muhammad Muhsin Khan and Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali, *Interpretation of the Meanings of the Noble Quran in the English Language* (Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam Publications, 1995), p. 836.

2 Sahih International, *The Quran: Arabic Text with Corresponding English Meanings* (Jeddah: Abul-Qasim Publishing House, 1997), p. 847.

3 Others of the many examples where it is difficult for the English translation to convey the complete meaning include the translations of verses *al-Baqarah* 286 and *al-Shoora* 11. *Al-Baqarah* 286 is discussed by this author in "Oft-Misunderstood Verses of the Quran (V)," *al-Basheer* (vol. 6, no. 5, Jan-Feb 1993), p. 5; a discussion of *al-Shoora* 11 may be found in Daraaz, vol. 1, pp. 163f.

> and before anything else to what has been narrated concerning the explanation of the Quran through authentic chains from the Prophet (peace be upon him) and the Noble Companions. This is what the statements of the scholars are agreed upon. It is through this type of reported and transmitted *tafseer* by which one can come across the meanings of many verses concerning which [the Arabic] language [by itself] could not explain their meanings. And one can, by knowledge of *asbaab al-nuzool* and abrogated and abrogating verses, that the commentator cannot do without, clarify many meanings and know many rulings [of many verses in the Quran].[1]

If, Abdul Raheem continues, the verses are not clear from these sources, then one turns to the use of the Arabic language. But, of course, this is only permissible for someone who is knowledgeable of the Arabic language.

And even when the Arabic language is used as a final source of *tafseer*, it must be used in the context of Quranically defined terms and style. That is, there are some terms and some styles of language used in the Quran that may not be known to everyone except through what has been narrated from the Companions and early scholars. Furthermore, the commentator must also keep in mind what the Book is and who it is who revealed it. Even when resorting to Arabic to comment on the Quran, these points must never be neglected.[2]

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[1]Abdul Raheem, p. 444.

[2]See al-Qurtubi, vol. 1, p. 34. For example, verse 59 of *soorah al-Israa* can be read and understood to mean, "We gave Thamood the she-camel, giving them sight, and they were wronged by it." The correct meaning is, "We gave Thamud the she-camel as a visible [sign] and they wronged themselves [by killing it]." [Cf., Ahmad ibn Yoosuf al-Sameen al-Halabi, *al-Durr al-Masoon fi Uloom al-Kibaab al-Maknoon* (Damascus: Daar al-Qalam, 1991), vol. 7, pp. 376-377; Izz al-Deen ibn Abdul Salaam, *Majaaz al-Quran (wa yusamma al-Ishaarah ila al-Eejaaz fi Badh Anwaa al-*

The use of the Arabic language in Quranic commentary and the commentary being consistent with Arabic language, style and vocabulary is something agreed upon by all scholars. The proof for its place in the role of *tafseer* is in the verses mentioned above.[1] At the same time, though, it must be realized that this source of *tafseer* comes after reference to the Quran, sunnah and statements of the Companions. The Quran and sunnah may particularize the meaning of specific verses although, just based on language, such verses may be open to other interpretations. Once the verses are defined or explained by other verses or by the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him), the door is closed to any new interpretation of said verses based only on the Arabic language.

The Need for *Ijtihaad* in Making *Tafseer*

The above sections do not mean to imply that it is forbidden for anyone to make any type of *ijtihaad* or personal judgments when it comes to interpreting the Quran. Such a claim would be foolish. *Ijtihaad* is the principle in Islam that makes Islam flexible and elastic enough to guide

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Majaaz) (Tripoli, Lebanon: Kulliyah al-Dawah al-Islaamiyyah, 1992), p. 269.] The usage of elision, ellipsis, figurative attribution and subaudition, for example, are part of the style of Arabic and, therefore, of the Quran that one must be familiar with before attempting to interpret the Quran.

[1]This is not the proper place to detail some of the important principles related to Arabic that commentators on the Quran must bear in mind. For details on such matters, the reader may consult Abu al-Nasr Ahmad al-Haddaadi, *Al-Madkhal li-Ilm Tafseer Kitaab Allah Taala* (Damascus: Dar al-Qalam, 1988), passim. An easy but useful reference is Manaa al-Qataan, *Mabaahith fi Uloom al-Quran* (Beirut: Muassasat al-Risaalah, 1983), pp. 196-230. The reader of the Quran must also be familiar with the vocabulary of the Quran. A number of books are helpful in this area with the most important undoubtedly being Al-Raghib al-Isfahani, *Mujam Mufradat Alfadh al-Quran* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.).

Muslims in every time and age from the time of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) until the Day of Judgment. Hence, *ijtihaad* in *tafseer* is not only permissible it is a must for every generation of Muslims as otherwise it would mean that the Muslims are not exerting themselves to get the guidance of the Quran for their own times. As Subhi al-Saalih wrote,

> The Quran itself summons to this *ijtihaad* in pondering over its verses and understanding its teachings. Allah says, "Here is a Book which We have sent down unto you, full of blessings, that they may meditate on its verses, and that men of understanding may receive admonition" (*Saad* 29).[1]

The point of the foregoing discussion was to show that the *ijtihaad* to be done in *tafseer* is not an unbridled and unconstrained studying of the words of the Quran to come up with new meanings of the Quran. The meanings of the verses[2] in the Quran are fixed and do not change over time. The meaning of the Quran is determined by the sources discussed above: the Quran, the sunnah, the statements of the Companions and the principles of the Arabic language. Once the meaning of the Quranic verse is determined through these incontrovertible and indisputable sources, the scholar is then free to determine how that meaning is to be applied in his particular circumstance, time and place. Again, the meaning is fixed determined by its sources but how that fixed meaning is reflected or applied in a certain place or time is the role of the scholar in making *ijtihaad*. Hence, the meaning is fixed, like a ready set of data, and it is within the constraints of that fixed meaning that the scholar must seek guidance for his own particular situation.

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[1]Subhi al-Saalih, *Mabaahith fi Uloom al-Quran* (Beirut: Daar al-Malaayeen, 1982), p. 292.

[2]One verse may have more than one meaning.

This point has been stressed here because a problem that occurs often is people making *ijtihaad* trying to apply the Quran to their own place and time but their *ijtihaad* is based on an incorrect interpretation of the Quran that contradicts one of the four sources discussed above. If the basis for the *ijtihaad* is incorrect, certainly the conclusions of the *ijtihaad* will most likely be incorrect. Hence the actions that follow will not be those consistent with the actual teachings of the Quran, even though the people might believe that they are implementing the Quran. And this is one way that people might turn to the Quran, sincerely trying to live their lives by it, and still not be following the straight path espoused by the Quran.

In order to avoid such pitfalls, certain procedures and conditions must be met before anyone indulges in making *ijtihaad* in interpreting the Quran.

The previous discussion was also meant to reiterate the conclusion made earlier that commenting on the Quran is not open to everyone. Before one can make *tafseer* or comment upon the Quran, he must be familiar with the teachings of the Quran as a whole, the hadith of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him), the statements of the Companions and the Arabic language. Without such knowledge, the likelihood is great that the forthcoming interpretation of the Quran will be wrong. Indeed, it may be completely inconsistent with the teachings of the Quran itself. Quranic commentary is a science and like any other science, it is to be handled by specialists or scientists who have the proper tools or meet the proper prerequisites.

Suggestions for Further Study

By now it should be obvious that to get a deeper understanding of the Quran, the novice must turn to the

scholars of Quranic commentary and read their beneficial works. One cannot simply read the Quran and begin to make conclusions concerning its deeper meanings without referring to what the scholars have written. This is especially true when one is reading a mere "translation" of the Quran and not the original Arabic itself.

In Arabic, there is a plethora of excellent commentaries from which one may benefit. Unfortunately, the English reader who does not have access to those works will have to face the harsh reality that the number of quality works in English commenting on the Quran are scanty to say the least. In particular, many of the works available in English fail to adequately apply the accepted methodology of Quranic commentary as outlined in this chapter. Here, some of the better of such works will be referred to so that the reader may consult those works to increase his understanding and knowledge of the Quran.[1]

Towards Understanding the Quran: English Version of Tafhim al-Quran[2] by Abul Ala Maudoodi is probably the most complete and extensive work of *tafseer* available in the English language. It was written by Abul Ala Maudoodi, a Muslim leader of this century, the founder of the Jamaat Islami in Pakistan, who passed away in 1979. Maudoodi wrote numerous books and a large number of them have been translated into English. The goal of the *Tafhim al-Quran* was to present the meaning of the Quran to the Urdu speaking populous of Pakistan/India in such a way that its meaning would be very clear to the masses. Two different translations (an earlier one and then a revised one with improved English) are available in English. Although this work has

[1] Most of these works are reviewed in more detail in the author's *The Methodologies of the Quranic Commentators*, from which much of the above information was taken.

[2] Abul Ala Maudoodi, *The Meaning of the Quran* (Lahore, Pakistan: Islamic Publications, 1982).

been the target of various criticisms, some warranted[1] and some not so warranted, it remains as the most comprehensive and informative work of *tafseer* on the entire Quran available in English.

Another work of importance is *Interpretations of the Meanings of the Noble Quran* by Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan. This work cannot truly be considered a commentary on the Quran but it is worth study. In it, Al-Hilali and Khan[2] have attempted to produce a translation of the Quran based on the conclusions of the most respected scholars of Quranic commentary, al-Tabari, al-Qurtubi and ibn Katheer. In addition, they have produce relevant hadith from *Sahih al-Bukhari* and included them under the related verses of the Quran. One characteristic that distinguishes this translation/*tafseer* from the other works available in English is that the translators have done their best to stick to the meanings of the verses as are found in what is reported from the Prophet (peace be upon him), Companions and Followers.

Two volumes of an abridged version of ibn Katheer's well-respected commentary on the Quran are also available. These two volumes are based on the abridgment of ibn

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[1] For example, Maududi stresses the importance of the Prophet (peace be upon him) in understanding the Quran, however, his *tafseer* itself does not have a great reliance on hadith. The most common usage of hadith is when he discusses some of the fiqh rulings. Furthermore, sometimes the hadith he uses are not of acceptable quality. In addition, he also only occasionally quotes the explanations of the verses as given by the Companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Finally, he does have a tendency to reinterpret some of the attributes of Allah in ways that are not consistent, for example, with the understanding of the Companions and their followers.

[2] These two have produced two works. One is available in one volume and it contains a number of hadith as footnotes and a few explanatory remarks. The second is a nine volume work which contains a great deal more hadith from *Sahih al-Bukhari*. Unfortunately, in the Kazi Publications edition of 1989 the *surah*s from *surah al-Haaqah* (number 69) and *surah al-Naba* (number 78) are missing in between volumes eight and nine of the work.

Katheer's work by Muhammad Naseeb al-Rifaai.[1] In the introduction to the work, al-Rifaai defined his methodology for abridging ibn Katheer's work. He stated that he did his best not to distort the original meaning or point that ibn Katheer was trying to make in his *tafseer*. Second, he dropped the chains of authorities for the reports and, instead, simply stated the Companion's name and the name of the compiler of the report. Third, he would only quote one or two hadith when ibn Katheer may quote a number of hadith that virtually all express the same meaning. Fourth, as is written in the translation (p II), "I have omitted—- completely— the narrations from Jewish sources and also the ridiculous statements [!] that the author quoted for the sake of information." In addition to this work, Maktabah Daar al-Salaam in Riyadh is also producing a complete translation of yet another abridged version of ibn Katheer's commentary.

Another work that the serious student should take note of is *Tafsir Ishraq al-Ma'ani: Being a Quintessence of Quranic Commentaries* by Syed Iqbal Zaheer. This work is written by a contemporary author who seems to be still working on the project. To date, to this author's knowledge, three volumes have been published. The first volume covers to the end of *soorah al-Baqarah*, the second covers *soorah ali-Imraan* and the third volume covers the last thirtieth portion of the Quran.

Zaheer describes his methodology in the introduction. After presenting a thoughtful discussion of the different types of *tafseer*, he wrote,

> It will be my endeavor to present in this work, in the main, material that has so far been the prerogative of the Arabic-speaking reader: material without which the understanding of the Quran remains incomplete— from *tafasir* of old

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1 Muhammad Nasib ar-Rifai, *Tafsir ibn Kathir* (London: Al-Firdous, Ltd., 1996).

> and new such as: Ibn Jarir Tabari, Qurtubi, Razi, Zamakhshari, ibn Kathir, Alusi, Fi dilal al-Quran, Sabuni, to name a few. But it will also include selected and useful material from commentaries in Urdu and English such as, again to name a few, *Bayan al-Quran*, *Tafsir Majidi*, *Tafhim al-Quran*, *Ma'arif al-Quran* etc. Nevertheless, while selecting material from contemporary works, the critical eye will be kept open for errors of the conceptual type...[1]

Summary

In order to understand the Quran in depth, one must apply the principles of *tafseer* (Quranic exegesis). *Tafseer* is not something open to anyone or via any means. Making statements about *tafseer* without sound knowledge or an acceptable methodology is very dangerous. One must use great caution when speaking about the Quran, as was the practice of the Companions and early scholars. Hence, this chapter has covered the most important sources of Quranic commentary that the reader must turn to. These sources are, first and foremost, other verses of the Quran and its explanation as given by the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) whose role it was to explain the Quran to mankind. As the reader learns more and more of the details of the Quran, his appreciation for the Quran should grow and he should become more attached to it, yearning to learn even more of its deep and profound meanings.

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1 Syed Iqbal Zaheer, *Tafsir Ishraq al-Ma'ani: Being a Quintessence of Quranic Commentaries* (Bangalore, India: Iqra Welfare Trust, 1992), vol. 1, xxiii

Chapter 8
The Need to Return to the Guidance of the Quran

This book has been about the importance of the Quran and how to approach and understand it. This next to last chapter will be an attempt to make the reader understand what an imperative it is for all to return to the Quran and receive its guidance. This is a must for the welfare of mankind in both this life and the Hereafter.

Need for Quranic Guidance for Humanity as a Whole

Allah states in the Quran,

وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ

"Thus We have appointed you a just and best nation, that you may be witnesses against mankind" (*al-Baqarah* 143). This is one of the roles or responsibilities of the Muslim nation. It is supposed to be a witness against mankind, demonstrating the truth of the Quranic message and actively propagating it to the rest of the world. This is part of the reason why this is the best nation raised for mankind,

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ

"You are the best community that has been raised up for mankind. You enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency and you believe in Allah" (*ali-Imraan* 110). The most important "good" that the Muslims can enjoin and encourage is correct belief in *tauheed* and believing and applying the Quran. The most important "evil" Muslims can eradicate and struggle against is disbelief and turning away from the Quran.

Obviously, as Muslims miss the link between their actions and beliefs and the Quran, they are no longer able to fulfill their noble responsibilities just described. This means that the only community that possesses God's pure teachings and revelations is lacking in its application and study. This is just one reason why humanity is living under its present circumstances. In fact, these circumstances do not differ greatly from what existed before the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) received his first Quranic revelation.

Ungodly philosophies are dominating the world today. Secularism and materialism, in all of their different forms, are the only ideologies that people and societies take seriously today.[1] But these ideologies can never bring true happiness to mankind. This is true for many reasons. First, these ideologies, since they deny divine guidance, are based on the limited capabilities, intelligence and understanding of the human mind. It is very unfortunate that secularism, developed in a specific area of the world simply due to the falseness of the prevailing religion of that place, has now spread to the entire world. Unfortunately, due to its historical growth confronting a distorted and misguiding Christian religion, it denies any real, active role for religion. Siddiqi wrote,

> Is it not the misfortunate of humanity that when Europe loosened the grip of religion over reason, the spate of reason took the direction which led to

[1]Except for those areas where the Islamic revival has been strong and has raised the consciousness of the people.

the severest trials of mankind? Whatever intellectual or practical corruption is to be witnessed in the world today is the consequence of this 'liberated reason'. Since the rationalists were initially pitted against men of religion, taking religion to be the principal adversary of reason, the rationalists concluded that their creed could not develop unless religions were first completely wiped out from the world. Had the rationalists probed further they would have realized that it is not religion but the argumentation of a particular class is the real foe of reason. This is the fallacious starting point from where the champions of secularism set forth and having taken to a false course all their steps moved in the wrong direction and even after the passage of two centuries they have not yet found the right direction.

One inevitable consequence of this conflict between reason and religion was that Western intellect was completely divorced from moral laws. When the basic concepts of religion were discredited, the hold of moral regulations also gradually vanished. The alienation from morality and hatred for religion which was the outcome of a historical process is a characteristic of Western mind whose effects dominate and permeate all sections of Western culture. Although some Western scholars have always maintained that they have no reservations or animosity towards religion and its precepts and that they uphold free inquiry only within the field of physical sciences, yet this is not the case in practice.[1]

[1]Abdul Hameed Siddiqi, *Islam and the Remaking of Humanity* (Lahore: Kazi Publications, 1978), pp. 199-200.

It is futile for humans to think they can "guide" mankind. Human knowledge is very limited. Even in controlled experiments, trial and error is one of the only methods to follow. Certainly, that cannot be done with societies as a whole.[1] Indeed, by so doing, they are moving into a realm that belongs exclusively to Allah. The question concerning who has the right and ability to truly guide mankind revolves around another set of fundamental questions. These questions are: Who is the Creator? Who is the one controlling and running the universe? Who is the one who has the right to be the ruler? Who is God and the one who must be submitted to? Is it Allah or is it mankind?[2] The answers that today's secular societies give to these questions are clear.

As a whole, today's secular societies have denied God, either saying God is dead, that He never existed or if He does exist, He has no right to interfere in human's daily affairs.[3] On the other hand, they have created their own gods in His place which make their own laws for them.[4] They give this god many names, such as science, humanism, democracy, liberalism, existentialism, freedom and so on.

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[1]Furthermore, the "all other things being held constant" assumption that is almost invoked will never be met in the real world. In addition, human reasoning can never be completely objective; subjectivity and ulterior motives will always influence many.

[2]Cf., Muhammad Qutb, *Madhaahib Fikriyyah Muaasirah* (Cairo: Daar al-Shurooq, 1988), pp. 535.

[3] This author has actually seen in newspapers pictures of people in pro-abortion or pro-homosexuality rallies carrying signs reading, "What right does God have to say anything about my body," and other similar messages.

[4]This is similar to the people in the time of *jahiliya* as the following verse shows: "And the idolaters say: Had Allah willed, we would not have worshipped anything besides Him, we and our fathers, *nor had we forbidden anything without (command from) Him*" (*al-Nahl* 35). Their argument was that it was acceptable for them to make their own laws instead of following the laws revealed by Allah.

The bottom line, though, is that they are claiming for themselves something they are not capable of, something only Allah is capable of: guiding mankind to the way of life that is best for all. Only Allah, the Creator, has the knowledge of this creation to guide mankind to the way of life that is best for it. Only Allah can do that and it is by His mercy that He revealed to His messengers the teachings mankind needs to know the straight path and proper way of living.[1]

Secondly, these ideologies can only seek to satisfy one aspect of a human: his material side. Very few today would dare deny that there is more to being a human than the physical aspect.[2] A human combines both a physical body and a spiritual soul. Materialist ideologies can only seek to satisfy the physical needs. And, even then, failures to meet these needs are evident as one can see by the collapse of the Soviet bloc materialist nations and the amount of poverty and physical suffering in the capitalist parts of the world.

But even when these societies are capable of meeting man's physical needs to an acceptable extent, the individual will still be left empty or with a void. He can eat and work for years. He can enjoy sensual pleasures for years. But sooner or later, if he has at least something left of his *fitra* (natural disposition), he will ask himself, "What is it all worth? When I die, what will all those material possessions of this world mean? And what will happen when I actually

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[1]More importantly, and something that no secularist can deny, is that Allah is the only one who knows what deeds are pleasing to Him and what deeds are displeasing to Him. Hence, even the secularist who claims to believe in God must admit that if one is not only interested in worldly benefits but also interested in finding a way of life that is pleasing to God and best for him in this life and the Hereafter, he has no recourse except to turn to the revelation from God.

[2]Unfortunately, Darwinian influences are still strong and many in the West still believe that humans are simply an evolved animal with no special characteristics or role in this world.

meet my Maker?" Although it seems that today's secular and material societies are trying to keep people so busy and preoccupied[1] that they do not have the time or the desire to think about these questions, for some of them at least, sooner or later, these questions will arise. But if the society has turned away from God, it cannot give any suitable answer to these questions. This is a basic problem of any secular, materialist society. And it is a problem that will keep the members of that community from ever attaining true happiness of the soul. And it is a problem whose solution such societies can never find until they realize that they must return to the guidance of Allah as found in the teachings of His last messenger Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Thirdly, another problem with such societies is the lack of any valid criteria to judge moral questions. The "morality" that will be considered acceptable will either be that of the ruling majority or of a powerful elite. In any case, morality will not be accepted solely because it is necessarily correct or worthy. Indeed, if such a dominant morality turns humans into creatures behaving worse than animals, not much can be said or done about it. And since such societies are materialist, in the long-run, only material considerations and sensual pleasures will be important, and true ethics as a whole will be done away with.

Those are just three of the main problems that go hand in hand with secularism and materialism. There are still numerous other problems but the source for all of them is the same: the failure to recognize the place of God in one's life and the importance of His teachings. It is true that anyone today is free to "believe" in God and many people claim to.

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1 Work, entertainment, sports, trivial enjoyments, and so on can take up so much of a person's life in today's civilization that very little time is left over to contemplate the more important questions of one's life. Of course, for many, there is no desire to consider these questions as they simply engross themselves in this worldly life.

However, M. M. Siddiqi noted while writing about secularism,

> It is this improper or faulty belief in God that has wrecked havoc for mankind. This incorrect belief in God is what desperately needs to be corrected. The world must return to God, not as a philosophical curiosity, but as the Lord and Guide of Mankind who sent prophets to teach mankind the true course to follow.
>
> Religion was permitted a certain measure of freedom so long as it confined itself to the purely intellectual region and was held as an opinion not to be put to the hazard of action. God was to be accepted by those who did accept Him, but He was not to be obeyed. The idea of God as the Creator remained, but of God as the Law-giver, the Nourisher, the Sustainer, the Guide, the object of man's primary allegiance, and the authority to be obeyed above all others, was laid aside and frowned upon. Men were ready to believe in God, but they would not tolerate His guidance or interference in their daily practical conduct. It was an impotent God they wanted, not the Almighty one with a claim on their obedience.[1]

These facts are not recognized by Muslims alone. Many adherents of different religions have noted these points, in particular Jews and Christians. This has led to a great resurgence in religious fervor and attempted return to God. Kepel has described these movements in the following words,

> [The Jewish, Christian and Muslim movements for the reaffirmation of religious identity] have

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[1]Muhammad Mazhar-ud-Din Siddiqi, *After Secularism What?* (Lahore: Islamic Publications, Ltd., 1973), pp. 3-4.

> arisen in a world which has lost the assurance born of scientific and technological progress since the 1960s... During this same period the great atheistic messianic ideology of the twentieth century, communism, which had left its make on most of our social utopias, went into its death throes... These movements have a great deal in common beyond mere historical simultaneity. They are at one in rejecting a secularism that they trace back to the philosophy of the Enlightenment. They regard the vainglorious emancipation of reason from faith as the prime cause of all the evils of the twentieth century...[1]

However, there is a big difference between the plight of Jews and Christians vis-a-vis Muslims and their plausible solutions to the world's woes. The difference lies in the fact that it is only the Muslims who possess the revelation from God in its original and unaltered form. The distorted revelations in the hands of the Jews and Christians contain passages that are repugnant, for good reason, to the modern mind. Hence, mankind will never completely return to those sources and accept them as authoritative. It is the pure and true revelation, the Quran, that can rescue mankind.

Therefore, to put it more specifically, the source of the world's problems is the failure of Muslims first and the rest of humanity secondly to turn to the Quran and understand and apply it correctly. This is what has led mankind to the place it is today: a world of secularism, turmoil, fear of the future, uneasiness and so on.

The only hope for the happiness of mankind lies in a return, and a proper and correct return as described in these articles, to the Quran, the last revelation of Allah to His final prophet that has been perfectly preserved since the time of its

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1 Gilles Kepel, *The Revenge of God: The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the Modern World* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), pp. 191-192.

revelation and which is meant to be the guide for all of mankind until the Day of Resurrection.

The Plight of the Muslim Nation Today

As alluded to above, the reason for the ideological, intellectual and theological crisis that mankind is going through today is the fact that the Muslims are not leading mankind nor showing mankind the way to God's guidance as found in the Quran.

The Muslim nation today can be described as an ill nation. However, its cure can be found in the Quran. The late al-Shanqeeti noted that part of the fact that the Quran leads to the way that is most upright and best is that it also leads to the solutions of this world in the best way possible. He notes that nowadays there are three essential problems facing the world, in particular the Muslim nation, and the Quran has presented the solution for all of them.[1]

The first major problem is the weakness of the Muslim Nation with respect to standing up to the disbelievers, even though Muslims supposedly number one billion in today's world. This reality is witnessed day in and day out by, for example, the slaughter of Muslims in Bosnia and Kosovo while the most of the Muslim world sits, apparently unable to help. The Quran clearly and unequivocally shows the solution to this problem. The problem itself actually lies in the hearts and souls of the Muslims. The solution therefore lies in their turning sincerely to Allah, strengthening their faith and putting their trust in Allah, the all-mighty, the all-powerful, the one with control over all things. The one who truly belongs to Allah's party can never be overcome by any of the disbelievers, no matter how strong they seem to be.

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[1] Cf., al-Shanqeeti, vol. 3, pp. 452-457.

For the Battle of the Trench, the disbelievers mustered together a great force to come and attack Islam in its home in Madinah. Indeed, all of the "powers that be" gathered together to bring an end to Islam. Allah described their forces in the following verse in *soorah al-Ahzaab*,

إِذْ جَاءُوكُمْ مِنْ فَوْقِكُمْ وَمِنْ أَسْفَلَ مِنْكُمْ وَإِذْ زَاغَتْ الأَبْصَارُ وَبَلَغَتْ الْقُلُوبُ الْحَنَاجِرَ وَتَظُنُّونَ بِاللَّهِ الظُّنُونَ هُنَالِكَ ابْتُلِيَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَزُلْزِلُوا زِلْزَالاً شَدِيدًا

"Behold! They came on you from above you and from below you, and behold, the eyes became dim and the hearts gaped up to the throats, and you imagined various (vain) thoughts about Allah! In that situation were the Believers tried: they were shaken as by a tremendous shaking" (*al-Ahzaab* 10-11).

Such was the enormity of the attack the early Muslims were facing. How was it that they had the courage to face such an attack and stand up to this great army? How can they make a stand today under similar circumstances? The answer to that question is found in Allah's description of the true believers— unlike those who *claim* to have faith but who do not have faith in the Quran in their hearts—

وَلَمَّا رَأَى الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الأَحْزَابَ قَالُوا هَذَا مَا وَعَدَنَا اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَصَدَقَ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَمَا زَادَهُمْ إِلاَّ إِيمَانًا وَتَسْلِيمًا

"When the believers saw the Confederate forces they said: 'This is what Allah and His Messenger had promised us, and Allah and His Messenger told us what was true.' And it only added to their faith and their zeal in obedience" (*al-Ahzaab* 22). It is the complete and true faith, which is accompanied by a true submission to the laws and patterns of Allah with

respect to the interactions of this world, that leads the Muslims to be able to stand up to the disbelievers no matter how strong they seem to be on a superficial level. It is not surprising that without this faith, which in itself is enhanced and strengthened by reading and studying the Quran, the Muslims are weak and unable or unwilling to stand up to and defend themselves from the onslaught of atheism and disbelief that is spreading throughout the world today.

Allah then states the result of that true belief in the face of that strong enemy—a result which comes when the believer truly believes in what Allah has promised and stated in the Quran, as described earlier—

وَرَدَّ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِغَيْظِهِمْ لَمْ يَنَالُوا خَيْرًا وَكَفَى اللَّهُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ الْقِتَالَ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ قَوِيًّا عَزِيزًا وَأَنْزَلَ الَّذِينَ ظَاهَرُوهُمْ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ مِنْ صَيَاصِيهِمْ وَقَذَفَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمُ الرُّعْبَ فَرِيقًا تَقْتُلُونَ وَتَأْسِرُونَ فَرِيقًا وَأَوْرَثَكُمْ أَرْضَهُمْ وَدِيَارَهُمْ وَأَمْوَالَهُمْ وَأَرْضًا لَمْ تَطَئُوهَا وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرًا

"And Allah turned back the unbelievers for (all) their fury. No advantage did they gain. Sufficient is Allah for the believers in their fight. And Allah is full of Strength, Able to enforce His Will. And those of the people of the Book who aided them, Allah did take them down from their strongholds and cast terror into their hearts, (so that) some you killed, and some you made prisoners. And He made you heirs of their lands, their houses, and their goods, and of a land which you had not frequented (before). And Allah has power over all things" (*al-Ahzaab* 25-27).

Muslims must think about this lesson. They must realize that what Allah says in the Quran is true and that His promise is ever true. When they take this lesson and truth from the Quran, this problem and weakness of the Muslims to stand up to the forces of disbelief will be removed, Allah willing.

The second problem al-Shanqeeti discusses is the fact that not only are the Muslims not able to stand up for themselves and Islam but, in addition, the unbelievers are overpowering the Muslims and inflicting them with killings, injuries and punishment although the Muslims possess the truth and the unbelievers have nothing but falsehood.

Allah directly addressed this issue and gave a ruling for it that will be read until the Day of Judgment. During the Battle of Uhud, the unbelievers were able to inflict great harm upon the believers. Indeed, the uncle and cousin of the Prophet (peace be upon him) were killed. In fact, many were killed and even mutilated. The Prophet (peace be upon him) himself did not escape injury in that battle. At that time, some of the Muslims themselves asked how could that occur while they were following the truth and the unbelievers were following falsehood. It was in response to that situation that Allah revealed the verse,

أَوَلَمَّا أَصَابَتْكُم مُّصِيبَةٌ قَدْ أَصَبْتُم مِّثْلَيْهَا قُلْتُمْ أَنَّى هَذَا قُلْ
هُوَ مِنْ عِندِ أَنْفُسِكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

"What! When a single disaster smites you, although you smote (your enemies) with one twice as great, do you say, 'From where is this?' Say [O Muhammad, to them], 'It is from yourselves: for Allah has power over all things'" (*ali-Imraan* 165).

In this verse, Allah did not explain exactly what it was from their own doing. However, another verse in the same *soorah* makes the complete picture clear:

وَلَقَدْ صَدَقَكُمُ اللَّهُ وَعْدَهُ إِذْ تَحُسُّونَهُم بِإِذْنِهِ حَتَّى إِذَا
فَشِلْتُمْ وَتَنَازَعْتُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ وَعَصَيْتُم مِّن بَعْدِ مَا أَرَاكُم مَّا
تُحِبُّونَ مِنكُم مَّن يُرِيدُ الدُّنْيَا وَمِنكُم مَّن يُرِيدُ الْآخِرَةَ ثُمَّ
صَرَفَكُمْ عَنْهُمْ لِيَبْتَلِيَكُمْ

"Allah did indeed fulfil His promise to you when you, by His permission, were about to annihilate your enemy, until you flinched and fell to disputing about the order, and disobeyed it after He brought you in sight (of the Booty) which you covet. Among you are some that hanker after this world and some that desire the Hereafter. Then did He divert you from your foes in order to test you" (*ali-Imraan* 152).

This shows that the reason the unbelievers were able to get the upper hand over the believers was because the believers themselves disputed and disobeyed the command from the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) as some of them were tempted by the things of this world. They sought the goods of this world and they gave that preference to obeying Allah and His Messenger (peace be upon him) and that is why Allah allowed the unbelievers to afflict harm to them. This is the root of the disease and the cure is obvious.

Muslims must look at themselves— even before they start blaming the unbelievers for what is happening to the Muslim nation,[1] as the unbelievers will always try to fight Islam, that is a given, but the results of that struggle are actually determined by the Muslims and their relationship with Allah. Muslims must study their relationship to Allah

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1 Some speakers seem to blame all of the problems the Muslims are facing on the disbelievers without ever referring to what the Muslims themselves are doing as a possible cause. The danger of this approach is that it leaves the Muslims feeling content with their Islam and never opens their eyes to the realization that what is occurring is the result of what their own hands have earned.

and His words in the Quran. They must ask themselves whether they are applying the Quran in their lives or are they ignoring the teachings of the Quran in order to gain some paltry benefits in this world. If they are ignoring the Quran for the sake of this world, then they have no reason to be surprised that Allah has allowed them to be humiliated at the hands of the unbelievers.

The third problem that al-Shanqeeti discusses is the disunity of the Muslims today. He says that this is one of the greatest reasons why the Muslim nation is in a state of defeat and weakness. Disunity leads to weakness and loss of strength, as Allah says,

وَلَا تَنَازَعُوا فَتَفْشَلُوا وَتَذْهَبَ رِيحُكُمْ

"Fall not into disputes, lest you lose heart and your strength departs" (*al-Anfaal* 46).

Al-Shanqeeti says that one can find hatred and enmity among Muslims throughout the world today. There is no true love between them. Their hearts are truly divided. In *soorah al-Hashr* Allah describes a people whose hearts are divided in a similar fashion. Allah says,

تَحْسَبُهُمْ جَمِيعًا وَقُلُوبُهُمْ شَتَّى

"You would think them united but their hearts are divided" (*al-Hashr* 14). Then Allah immediately explains why their hearts are in that state:

ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَوْمٌ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ

"That is because there are a people devoid of reasoning" (*al-Hashr* 14). The disease of weak reasoning is what makes them unable to recognize the reality of things. They are not able to distinguish between truth and falsehood. They are not able to distinguish what is truly beneficial from what is actually harmful. This disease— which Muslims themselves are suffering from today— can only be removed by the light

of revelation. It can only be removed by a complete and sincere return to the Quran. It is the revelation that gives life to the dead and makes the path clear and bright such that the person can distinguish truth from falsehood, goodness from evil, benefit from harm. The person can then follow the straight path rather than the many erroneous paths that mankind chooses to follow. Allah has described this truth in many places in the Quran, such as:

أَوَمَنْ كَانَ مَيْتًا فَأَحْيَيْنَاهُ وَجَعَلْنَا لَهُ نُورًا يَمْشِي بِهِ فِي النَّاسِ كَمَنْ مَثَلُهُ فِي الظُّلُمَاتِ لَيْسَ بِخَارِجٍ مِنْهَا كَذَلِكَ زُيِّنَ لِلْكَافِرِينَ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

"Can he who was dead, to whom We gave life, and a Light whereby he can walk among men, be like him who is in the depths of darkness, from which he can never come? Thus it has been made pleasing to the disbelievers that which they were doing" (*al-Anaam* 122).

أَفَمَنْ يَمْشِي مُكِبًّا عَلَى وَجْهِهِ أَهْدَى أَمَّنْ يَمْشِي سَوِيًّا عَلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ

"Is then one who walks headlong, with his face groveling, better guided, or one who walks evenly on a Straight Way?" (*al-Mulk* 22).

Finally, Allah says,

اللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا يُخْرِجُهُمْ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ

"Allah is the patron and supporter of those who believe. He brings them out from the darknesses into the light" (*al-Baqarah* 257).

On this last point concerning disunity among Muslims, Abd Rabbihi makes an important point. He states that if there were a strong bond between the Muslims and the

Quran, such that they recite it and study it and take it as their source of law and guidance, their beliefs, thoughts and concepts would be guided by their belief in *tauheed*. This would immediately lead to their hearts, ranks, goals and energies being united in the shade of the Quran.[1] Indeed, to support Abd Rabbihi's claim, one need only look at the Companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and the effect that this Quran and belief had upon them, as Allah Himself describes it in the Quran,

وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا وَاذْكُرُوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنتُمْ أَعْدَاءً فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُم بِنِعْمَتِهِ إِخْوَانًا وَكُنتُمْ عَلَى شَفَا حُفْرَةٍ مِنَ النَّارِ فَأَنقَذَكُم مِنْهَا كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ

"And hold fast, all together, by the Rope which Allah, and be not divided among yourselves. And remember [with gratitude] Allah's favor on you, for you were enemies and He joined your hearts in love, so that by His Grace, you became brethren; and you were on the brink of the Pit of Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus does Allah make His Signs clear to you: that you may be guided" (*ali-Imraan* 103).

The Muslims today can be taken from their plight of darkness into light if they return to the Quran in the proper manner. However, as al-Hakami pointed out, they must first sincerely turn to Allah and be willing and ready to repent for their sins and shortcomings. In particular, they must repent from the diseases in their hearts that have made their hearts rusty or dead. In this way, the heart will be ready to accept the guidance of the Quran.[2]

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[1] Abd Rabbihi, p. 71.
[2] Al-Hakami, pp. 90-91.

In addition, they must repent from the manner in which they have treated the Quran. They must break down all of the barriers between themselves and the Quran. They must turn to it sincerely seeking its guidance and willingly apply it completely in their lives. This has been their greatest shortcoming. This they have to realize. After they realize it, they can start on the road to correcting it by reading, learning, studying and applying the Quran in the proper manner.

The Results of Turning Away from Allah's Remembrance and the Quran

Throughout this work the stress has been on a proper and correct approach and return to the Quran. Except for an indirect discussion in this chapter, there has been very little discussion of the results of turning away from Allah's remembrance and His revelation. Before concluding this work, it is important to mention some of the verses that describe the results of the greatest mistake mankind can make: ignoring the Word of Allah, turning away from its teachings and not applying it in one's life.

Among the many verses in which Allah refers to those who ignore or turn away from His signs and revelation are the following:

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ ذُكِّرَ بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِ ثُمَّ أَعْرَضَ عَنْهَا إِنَّا مِنَ الْمُجْرِمِينَ مُنتَقِمُونَ

"And who does more wrong than one to whom are recited the signs of his Lord, and who then turns away therefrom? Verily from those who transgress We shall exact (due) Retribution" (*al-Sajdah* 22).

وَمَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَنْ ذِكْرِي فَإِنَّ لَهُ مَعِيشَةً ضَنكًا وَنَحْشُرُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ أَعْمَى قَالَ رَبِّ لِمَ حَشَرْتَنِي أَعْمَى وَقَدْ كُنتُ بَصِيرًا قَالَ كَذَلِكَ أَتَتْكَ آيَاتُنَا فَنَسِيتَهَا وَكَذَلِكَ الْيَوْمَ تُنسَى

"But whosoever turns away from My Message, verily for him is a life of hardship,[1] and We shall raise him up blind on the Day of Judgment. He will say, 'O my Lord! Why have You raised me up blind while I had sight (before)?' (Allah) will say, 'Thus did you, when Our Signs came unto you, disregard them: so will you, this day, be disregarded'" (*Taha* 124-126).

وَمَنْ يُعْرِضْ عَنْ ذِكْرِ رَبِّهِ يَسْلُكْهُ عَذَابًا صَعَدًا

"But if any turns away from the remembrance of his Lord, He will cause him to undergo a severe penalty" (*al-Jinn* 17).

وَمَنْ يَعْشُ عَنْ ذِكْرِ الرَّحْمَانِ نُقَيِّضْ لَهُ شَيْطَانًا فَهُوَ لَهُ قَرِينٌ

"If anyone withdraws himself from remembrance of (Allah) Most Gracious, We appoint for him an evil devil to be an intimate companion to him" (*al-Zukhruf* 36).

Finally, Allah warns the believers to stay away from those who turn away from the Book of Allah and He gives an

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1 It has been narrated that ibn Abbaas has explained that this portion of the verse means that they will be living in sin even if they have material means and comforts. (Cf., al-Raawi, p. 236.) In essence, those people who are not living according to Allah's guidance, that guidance which is in conformity with their true nature, will never be able to find true happiness no matter how much material comforts they may possess. Their souls will always rest uneasy due to their lack of a sound relationship with their Creator.

all inconclusive picture of the real nature of those who do not live their lives according to Allah's revelation:

فَأَعْرِضْ عَنْ مَنْ تَوَلَّى عَنْ ذِكْرِنَا وَلَمْ يُرِدْ إِلاَّ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا
ذَلِكَ مَبْلَغُهُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ
سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ اهْتَدَى

"Therefore shun those who turn away from Our Message and desire nothing but the life of this world. That is their sum of knowledge. Verily your Lord knows best those who stray from His Path, and He knows best those who receive guidance" (*al-Najm* 29-30).

Summary

Humanity, both Muslims and non-Muslims alike, are in need of the guidance of Allah as found in the Quran. Without this guidance, they are at a lost, whether they realize it or not and whether they are willing to admit it or not. Mankind is not able to guide itself in all aspects of life. Furthermore, when Muslims do not turn to the Quran in the proper manner, they also do not receive that needed guidance completely or correctly. For both this life and the Hereafter, all must turn to the Quran in the proper manner to receive its guidance and apply it in their lives.

Chapter 9
Final Words

The Quran is still the Book of Allah, God's guidance for humanity, minutely preserved since the time of its revelation. If the Muslims would turn to the Quran and receive its guidance, they would receive blessings for both this life and the Hereafter. It has become a very sad state of affairs, but for many of today's estimated one billion Muslims, there is a barrier between them and the Quran. It is not a physical barrier. Most Muslims are free to open the Quran and read its pages, as probably most do. No, the barrier is a much more dangerous barrier than a physical barrier because many Muslims do not perceive that the barrier even exists. It is a barrier between the heart of the individual and the Quran, between the person's actions and the teachings of the Quran, between his aspirations and dreams in this life and what Allah is calling him to in both this life and Hereafter, between his way of life and culture and the straight path described in the Quran. Again, this is a most dangerous barrier because the person may not perceive it. He has the Quran in his house; he puts it in the most honorable place in the house; and he will even swear profusely to his belief in it. Yet the Quran does not guide him; he is not being moved by the Quran; when he leaves his house or the mosque, he does not act according to its commands nor does he judge and see things in its light.

This is the problem that this work has been trying to tackle. It could be argued that this book has covered the most important topic concerning the Muslim world today. Many people lecture and write about what is wrong with the Muslim nation and what needs to be done. Many such people

have even pointed out that "the Muslims need to return to the Quran." But some of them fail to note or explain what is really meant by "returning to the Quran." The individual Muslim who reads the Quran may not see why he is missing the guidance of the Quran and he might argue that there is no need for him "to return to the Quran" because, he thinks, he has never strayed from the Quran.

In reality, there is a need for the Muslim nation as a whole to return to the Quran. Any cursory glance at the Muslim world will quickly reveal that the governments and the masses as a whole are not applying the Quran and, in fact, many of them actually have no idea what the guidance of the Quran is all about. For many, the Quran is simply a book to be read as an act of devotion or worship. Others see it as a book simply explaining the existence of a Creator and so on.

What needs to be understood and studied in detail is what exactly are the barriers that have kept the Quran from leading the present Muslim people. Historical factors aside, this has been the concern of this book. The author has attempted to look objectively at the Muslims and how they deal with the Quran to see what exactly is the missing link between them and the guidance of the Quran. Four main or broad causes have been pinpointed. These are stressing secondary aspects of the Quran at the expense of more important aspects, not realizing the major goals of the Quran, not approaching the Quran in the proper manner and not interpreting the Quran correctly. Once these factors have been recognized and identified, each Muslim individual can work on removing or solving them. The author has attempted to present both the problems and the solutions.

It might be beneficial to restate here the four causes and some of the remedies for them. First was emphasizing secondary aspects of the Quran. These aspects, such as using the Quran simply as a protection against evil, are all true and bona fide aspects of the Quran. The problem occurs when

they are all the reader tries to get out of the Quran. The reader must realize what the Quran is all about and how he can achieve the goals of the Quran. This leads to the second and third topics of this book. Second was failing to realize the major goals of the Quran. Five major goals were enumerated and discussed. When the reader realizes these goals, his reading, understanding, application of the Quran or, in other words, what he gets out of the Quran, will automatically and drastically change. Third, the reader must also realize how to approach the text of the Quran. With the proper approach, he will be able to gain more from the Quran and its teachings will become a reality for him. Finally, the only way to really benefit from the Quran is by first identifying or seeing its real meanings. These true meanings of the verses of the Quran are determined in a methodological fashion. The person must seek the meanings of the Quran through the other relevant verses of the Quran, the statements of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him), the statements of the Companions of the Prophet and the principles of the Arabic language. This will give the reader the correct meaning of the Quran and then, based on the correct meaning, the person will be able to apply the true Quranic teachings to his place and time.

Certainly more can be said to encourage the reader to return to the Quran in the proper fashion. One of the most important points that should affect the heart of the believer is a point made by both Muhammad Qutb and Nabeeh Abd Rabbih: Life with the Quran is, in reality, life with Allah. The Quran is Allah's speech and revelation directed toward mankind. It is a speech directly related to Allah's noble attributes of greatness, mercy and knowledge. When one lives his life according to the teachings of the Quran, he knows that he is living his life in a way that is pleasing to his

Creator, Lord and God. He will be aware of Allah's presence and he will strive to please his Lord.[1]

After having said all that has been said in this work, perhaps the most fitting way to conclude this book is by quoting Allah's words, words that should awaken the hearts of the believers and revive them to return to the word of Allah, the Quran, to read it sincerely and seriously and to submit to it completely. Allah says, in a verse that has had a great effect on many in the past,

أَلَمْ يَأْنِ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَنْ تَخْشَعَ قُلُوبُهُمْ لِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَمَا نَزَلَ مِنْ الْحَقِّ وَلا يَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ مِنْ قَبْلُ فَطَالَ عَلَيْهِمْ الأَمَدُ فَقَسَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَكَثِيرٌ مِنْهُمْ فَاسِقُونَ

"Has not the time arrived for the Believers that their hearts in all humility should engage in the remembrance of Allah and of the truth which has been revealed (to them), and that they should not become like those to whom was given revelation aforetime, but long ages passed over them and their hearts grew hard? For many among them are rebellious transgressors" (*al-Hadeed* 16).

1 Muhammad Qutb, *Diraasaat*, p. 487; Abd Rabbihi, p. 5.

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About the Book

In this work, the author has attempted to bridge the gap between Muslims and the Quran. The author writes about what the Quran is and what is a Muslim's responsibility toward it. He also studies the effect that the Quran had upon the first generation of Muslims and attempts to answer why the Quran does not seem to have the same miraculous effect today. The book discusses how many Muslims currently approach the Quran. Then it goes on to discuss the how the Quran should be approached and the main teachings of the Quran. The work also offers a lengthy discussion of the proper sources of *tafseer* or Quranic commentary.

One reviewer wrote of this work, "It will be useful reading for all Muslims, new converts and those who have been practicing for years. As I was reading, I found passages that built such a powerful crescendo of argumentation and commentary, that I was deeply touched."

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